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MY EMPRESS

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THE EX-CZARINA ALEXANDRA OF RUSSIA

MY EMPRESS

TWENTY-THREE YEARS OF INTIMATE LIFE
WITH THE EMPRESS OF ALL THE RUSSIAS
FROM HER MARRIAGE TO THE DAY OF HER EXILE

BY

MADAME MARFA MOUCHANOW

FIRST MAID IN WAITING
TO
HER FORMER MAJESTY
THE CZARINA ALEXANDRA OF RUSSIA

WITH
ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY
LONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD
MCMXVIII

JK354
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APR 15 1918

Press of
J. J. Little & Ives Co.
New York

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MY EMPRESS

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CHAPTER I

MY APPOINTMENT

It is the custom, or rather it was the custom, at the Russian Court, not to allow any Princess marrying into the Imperial family to bring with her maids from her own country. I believe that this custom was also observed at Foreign Courts, at least in former times. Therefore, when it became known that the heir to the Russian Throne, as Nicholas II. still was when he became the affianced husband of the lovely Princess Alix of Hesse, was about to bring a bride to his parents' home, speculations became rife, and much heart burning resulted among people who considered themselves entitled to the honour of becoming attendants on the future Empress of All the Russias.

Of course the choice of the maids destined to wait upon her was to a certain measure dependent

on the will of the Reigning Empress, and the latter felt that it would not do to surround her daughter-in-law with women unable to talk any other language than Russian. A list was submitted to her of ladies who were supposed to be eligible for the position, and, unknown to myself, my name was placed upon it.

The functions of first maid to a Czarina were far from being purely honorific. Of course she was not supposed to do any menial work, but, on the other hand, she had to show herself most discreet, to avoid gossip of any kind, to have no intimate friends or relatives in whom she might feel tempted to confide, and, moreover, considerable responsibility rested on her shoulders, as she had under her care not only the personal jewels of her Imperial mistress, but also those belonging to the Crown (when these happened to be used), the control of everything that was connected with the toilet and personal adornment of the Princess in whose service she stood, the paying of her private bills, and so forth. She had under her eight other maids, whose duties consisted in attending to the wants of the Princess, but these took no initiative, and were entirely dependent upon her, having to

obey her and to listen to all her instructions. One had to have a certain rank or Tschin, as it is called in Russian, to be able to obtain such an appointment, and probably the fact that my husband, who had died a short time before the marriage of Nicholas II. and Alexandra Feodorovna, had been a Colonel, had something to do with the fact that my name figured on the list of the women considered eligible for the position which I was to obtain.

As is well known, the arrival of the Princess Alix in Russia was hurried on account of the illness of the Czar Alexander III., who knew himself to be dying, and who wished to see his future daughter-in-law before he breathed his last. The Grand Duchess Elizabeth of Russia, the wife of the Grand Duke Sergius, who was the eldest sister of the Princess, went to meet her at Warsaw, and brought her to Livadia, in the Crimea, which she reached about three days before the demise of the Emperor. She was met on her arrival with all the honours pertaining to the bride of the heir apparent, but the circumstances which accompanied her journey were such sad ones, that they could not help painfully impressing her and adding to the natural melancholy of her character, which was al-

ready at that time sufficiently pronounced to cause anxiety to the people who surrounded her.

The mortal remains of Alexander III. were brought back with much pomp to St. Petersburg, where instead of making the solemn entry which Russian Imperial brides generally do in the capital, in golden coaches surrounded with elaborate ceremonies, the Princess Alix arrived in a mourning carriage, smothered in the folds of her crêpe veil. No one noticed her, and the general interest of the public was concentrated on the Empress Dowager, whose grief was pitiable to witness. The young girl about to take the latter's place on the throne of Russia felt quite lost and lonely amidst her new surroundings, and no one seemed to care for her, or to trouble as to what was going to befall her. At that time many people believed that her marriage would be postponed until after the mourning for Alexander III. was over, and hoped that something might yet occur to prevent its ever taking place. The alliance was not popular, and neither Court society nor the nation felt pleased at the idea of a German Princess coming to share the throne of their new Sovereign. He was known already to be absolutely lacking in

character, and many persons feared that through the influence which his wife might come to acquire over his mind, the Grand Duke Sergius, who was married, as I have already related, to the sister of the Princess Alix, would become paramount at the Russian Court. And the Grand Duke was the most hated and the most unpopular personage in the whole country.

Family intervention, however, decided otherwise, and, partly thanks to the efforts of the Prince and Princess of Wales, who had arrived in St. Petersburg to be with the Empress Marie in her hour of sorrow, it was decided to solemnise the nuptials of the new Czar as quickly as possible; therefore the twenty-sixth of November, 1894, the birthday anniversary of the widow of Alexander III., was chosen for it.

All this time I had not seen my new mistress. She was supposed to be too busy to have leisure to become acquainted with her future household, and it was only some three days before the one selected for the wedding that I was at last presented to her in the Palace of the Grand Duke Sergius, where she had resided since her arrival in St. Petersburg.

My first impression was that of a tall, slight girl,

with straight long features, a classical profile, and a lovely figure, which gave no indications of the tendency to stoutness that was to spoil it later on. She had fair hair that shone like gold in the sun, whilst at times it appeared quite dark, according to the light which played upon it. The mouth was the most defective feature in an otherwise almost perfectly beautiful face. It had a determined expression, which even then could be unpleasant, and the chin was decidedly heavy. But the general impression she produced was that of a superb woman. The deep mourning which she wore suited her, and heightened the natural whiteness of her lovely complexion, and I remember thinking that I had never yet seen any one more beautiful than this girl about to become my Empress.

She said very little to me, and what she did say was uttered in a low, constrained voice. She seemed to have a nervous dread at the idea of being compelled to have strangers about her, and she asked me to ascertain from the maid from whom she was about to part her customs and habits, so as to be able to direct the women who were to attend on her in the future. But when I asked her to allow me to begin my duties at once, she objected,

saying that it would be time enough on her wedding day.

This proved inconvenient in many respects, because it was most difficult to attend to the many details connected with a complicated toilet, such as a bridal one invariably is, let alone an Imperial one, and to make decisions for an utter stranger. According to etiquette the Grand Duchess (the Princess Alix had been given this title on the day she had entered the Greek Church) had to dress in the Winter Palace, where not only her eight maids, but all the ladies in waiting on the Empress Dowager, those of her own future household, and the jewels she was to wear, were awaiting her. To a room set aside for the purpose by etiquette had been brought the gold toilet service of the Empress Anne, which is always taken out for such occasions and for such only, and it was spread on a table before which the Princess was asked to sit. The diamond Crown used for Imperial weddings was then brought to the Empress Dowager, who, according to the rules of the ceremony, had to put it on the head of the bride. But an unforeseen incident occurred. The hairdresser, who was to adjust the crown and the bridal veil, could not be found; no

one knew where he was, nor could any one take his place. At last it was discovered that an over-zealous police official, believing his ticket of admission invalid, had refused to let him enter the Winter Palace. A whole hour went by before this was discovered, and the marriage was delayed for that length of time, to the wonder of the thousands of people assembled to witness it, in the various rooms and halls of the Imperial residence.

During this weary hour the Princess sat motionless before her looking glass, hardly saying a word, but with tears in her eyes which, however, she bravely tried to conceal. People buzzed around her, trying to attract her attention, but she did not seem to heed them, and merely waited and waited, with that patience which, as I discovered later on, was a distinctive feature in her character. At last the hairdresser was brought in, hot and excited, and he quickly fastened the diamond diadem on the head of the young bride, whom we proceeded to array in the long mantle of cloth of gold, lined with ermine, which she was to wear over her white gown. When she was ready and stood before us, previous to the starting of the procession for the chapel, we all uttered an exclamation. None among us had

ever gazed at anything more lovely than she appeared to our eyes, and indeed I have never, in the years that followed, seen Alexandra Feodorovna look so splendid as on that grey November morning which saw her married to the Czar of All the Russias.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST MONTHS OF THE CZARINA'S MARRIED LIFE

Owing to the haste with which the royal wedding was celebrated there was no time to prepare in advance suitable apartments for the Czar and his bride in any of the Imperial palaces either in St. Petersburg or in Czarskoi Selo. The latter residence had from the very first been spoken of as the future abode of the young couple, being a favourite one with the new Sovereign. But the Alexander Palace, the only one which was more or less adapted to the exigencies of modern life, had not been inhabited since the death of the Empress Marie Alexandrovna, the Consort of Alexander II., and required to be entirely overhauled. The Winter Palace, too, was in want of renovation, and particularly unsuitable, as the young Empress had expressed a wish to have the apartments which she was to occupy newly furnished, according to her own tastes and ideas. The result of this state of

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THE EX-CZAR NICHOLAS II OF RUSSIA

things was that the newly married couple spent the first months of their wedded life in the Anitschkoff Palace, the residence of the Dowager Empress, in the small rooms which had been occupied by Nicholas II. as a bachelor, rooms that were anything but comfortable, and where there was not even sufficient place for the wardrobe of the bride, who, besides, found herself without a sitting-room of her own, and had to borrow that of her mother-in-law whenever she wished to receive any one.

Of course this was not pleasant for her, and I will add that it put her from the very outset in a false position which she felt acutely. She was being treated like a child, and she would not have been human had she been pleased with the situation. During the first weeks of her marriage, when the whole court was still in deep mourning for the late Czar, it did not perhaps matter as much as it would have done later on, or under different circumstances, but still it was disagreeable. The Dowager Empress was, in her way, just such an authoritative character as was her daughter-in-law, therefore the two ladies soon found themselves in strong opposition, and, though they did not own to it, became heartily tired of each other. Six

weeks after the wedding Alexandra Feodorovna persuaded her husband to go for one week to Czarskoi Selo, and when she returned to St. Petersburg I found that a considerable change had taken place in her manners and bearing, much of her former diffidence and shyness having disappeared. She began to decide for herself certain things she would not have dreamt of doing before without having consulted her mother-in-law, and she organised her personal existence after her own heart. The first changes which she introduced concerned her maids' attendance upon her, and she called me into her presence one morning to discuss them at length, refusing to listen to some observations which I thought it my duty to make to her. In my opinion it would have been better to have waited until we had moved out of the Anitschkoff Palace before altering the rules which presided over the dressing-room and wardrobe paraphernalia of the young Empress, but my observations were not kindly received, and I was told most peremptorily to obey the instructions given to me, which of course I did, but not without misgivings as to the opportuneness of the changes introduced in the routine of my Imperial mistress' existence.

Amongst others was the disposal of the cast-off dresses of the young Empress. These were legion, as she had been presented with a trousseau of unusual abundance. But they were all of them, or nearly all, mourning or half-mourning gowns, and Alexandra seemed in haste to get rid of them. She had her own ideas in the matter of her toilets, and generally sketched, herself, the clothes which she ordered. She had not good taste, this much must be admitted, but she cared for dresses, and liked to see hers renewed as often as possible. Sometimes she had three or four garments laid out and displayed before her eyes before she finally made a choice. She had the idea that as a Sovereign she ought to dress with great magnificence from the very first hours of the morning, and she disdained the simple tailor costumes which, on the contrary, were so much liked by her mother-in-law. The latter had been the best dressed woman in her empire, but she had never fussed about her clothes, and had affected a great simplicity in her every day attire, reserving for state occasions the many Paris creations that were being constantly sent over to her. In a small house like the Anitschkoff Palace the servants knew, of course, everything that was

going on, and much gossip passed between the maids of the two Empresses, those of the young one complaining to the attendants of the Dowager of the fussiness of their mistress in regard to her toilet. This gossip reached higher than the housekeeper's room, and contributed to the reputation for caprice that Alexandra Feodorovna acquired almost immediately after her marriage, a reputation that was to cling to her and to harm her so much in public opinion later on.

Now I feel persuaded that if the Emperor and Empress had had from the very first days of their married life a home of their own, this would have been avoided, because there would have been no opportunity for gossip between servants. As it was, the Dowager once or twice made remarks to her daughter-in-law concerning the manner in which she worried her attendants by too much fuss about her clothes, and these were, of course, very badly received. And Alexandra Feodorovna bitterly resented an allusion that was made to the fact that when she was at Darmstadt she would not have dared to display such a capricious temper. All these things were but trifles, but nevertheless

they were to exercise considerable influence on the afterlife of my mistress.

The Empress was inordinately fond of beautiful furs and used to spend considerable sums in acquiring continually new and most costly ones. For this, too, she was reproached, and told that her trousseau had contained sufficient fur garments, so that there was no necessity to be always buying new ones. She was reported to be extravagant, with reason perhaps, though there was nothing inordinate about her love for pretty things; certainly the bills which she ran at Worth's and Paquin's, and other dressmakers of repute, were not half so large as those which her mother-in-law had incurred formerly. But then the latter had always been a favourite, and St. Petersburg society had smiled on everything she had ever done or said.

One of my duties was to take care of the Empress's jewels. She had received some splendid and costly wedding presents from her relatives in England and Russia, and especially from the Emperor, who, among other things, had presented her with an all round crown of pearls and diamonds which, together with some wonderful sapphires, he had bought in London when he had paid her a visit

there during their betrothal. She loved to wear them, and at first had not given a thought to the possibility of having to lay them aside for far more splendid parures and ornaments. But very soon after her marriage there arose a question concerning the Crown jewels, which were supposed to be devoted to the use of the reigning Empress. During the reign of Alexander III., the Empress Marie had had them in her own keeping, and by his will the Emperor had given her the use of them for her lifetime. Now it seems that he had not the power to dispose of them, and very naturally the treasury claimed them after the demise of the Czar. His widow, however, stoutly refused to give them up, and painful scenes ensued, which assumed such proportions that at last Alexandra Feodorovna declared that, for her part, she would never consent to wear the ornaments in dispute, that her mother-in-law was welcome to them, and could keep them as long as she liked. This, however, could not be done, and at last the jewels were returned to the treasury whence they were sometimes taken and handed over to me, with great ceremony, for the use of my mistress on state occasions. But the Empress never liked them, and

avoided putting them on, preferring her own jewels. She declared that the big pearl and diamond tiara, which, since the days of Catherine II., had graced the head of all the Russian Empresses, was far too heavy. I do not think I have seen her wear more than four or five times the famous necklace valued at twenty millions of roubles, which, on the contrary, had been one of the favourite ornaments of the Dowager Empress. The last time this historical jewel was seen in public was at the ball given by the nobility of St. Petersburg on the occasion of the three hundredth anniversary of the accession of the dynasty of Romanoff to the throne of the Ruriks, in February, 1915, which was also the last time that the Empress Alexandra ever appeared at any save a religious festivity.

Whenever she decided to put on any of those Crown jewels I had to send a note announcing her intention to the head treasurer in charge of the strong room where the diamonds and precious stones of the Czar were kept. He then summoned an escort of three soldiers out of the guard on duty in the Winter Palace, and, surrounded by them, brought me the articles I had requested him to deliver. I had to give a receipt for them, and as soon

as the Empress had taken them off I had to advise that same treasurer of the fact, then he immediately came with another escort to reclaim them, returning to me at the same time the receipt I had signed a few hours previous. The complications associated with this procedure were one of the reasons that made the Empress averse to using those ornaments, about which she did not care. She much preferred adding constantly to her private jewel boxes, and soon she became possessed of one of the most remarkable collections of precious stones in Europe. Pearls were her special favourites, and the Emperor, who was aware of the fact, was constantly presenting her with additions to her various necklaces, and other pearl ornaments, and the two Court jewellers, Bolin and Faberge, had a standing order to bring to Czarskoi Selo every fine specimen they could get hold of, before showing it to any one else among their customers.

This passion of the Empress for constantly acquiring new ornaments was also a cause of bitter reproach, and one of her aunts, the Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna, who was anything but kind and charitable, once characterised it as *"un gout de parvenue."*

In those early days of her married life there arose another cause of friction between the Empress and her mother-in-law. It was connected with the manner of praying in church for the two ladies. The Dowager insisted that her name ought to come first, immediately after that of her son, the Sovereign. But the ministers, and even the Holy Synod, objected and declared that, according to custom, the mother ought to rank after the wife. Finally it was the opinion of the Synod that prevailed. But Alexandra Feodorovna, who had interested herself deeply in the matter, was not wise enough to hide her joy at the turn things had taken, and this of course contributed to the strained relations that soon established themselves between her and the widow of Alexander III.

No harmony reigned at the Anitschkoff Palace during those early days of my mistress' married life, and it is no wonder that the latter became more and more embittered as time went on. She felt herself neglected, and did nothing to please those whom she suspected of wilfully slighting her. She had a morbid desire to please, combined with a natural haughtiness, which made her not only sensible to a rebuff, but also desirous of avenging it. She

did not care to be brushed aside by her relatives, and yet she was herself contributing to the cause of their actions, by her aloofness from all those who might have been of use to her. She did not understand St. Petersburg society; she considered it immoral and fast, and she made no secret of the fact, snubbing unnecessarily people strong enough to do her serious harm by their judgments and appreciations of her conduct and personality. The misunderstandings which caused her future unpopularity began from the very first hours of her arrival in Russia.

With her attendants, however, she was always kind and gracious, though distant in her manner. It was only after many years that she grew to have confidence in me, but then it was a complete one, and sometimes she would allow herself to give way in my presence to fits of despondency such as overtook her from time to time, during which I feel perfectly convinced she was not entirely responsible for her actions. Her mind, always prone to melancholy, made her look at things on their blackest side, and this partly accounts for the tendency towards mysticism which she was to develop later on, and which contributed, more than anything else,

to the catastrophe that was to send her an exile to the solitudes of Siberia. She was never well balanced, and, when judging her, one must not forget that insanity was hereditary in the House of Hesse, a fact of which many people in Russia were aware, but of which it seems that the Imperial family were left in ignorance. Sensitive to a degree, she could not get rid of prejudices which she was inclined to adopt without any reason other than caprice, and prejudices are among the things which sovereigns ought never to entertain in regard to those whom they may happen to meet, or with whom they are surrounded. But with it all she was sweet and gentle, and good, and conscientious; a perfect mother, a most devoted wife, a staunch friend, incapable of meanness or of treachery, but destined by her very qualities to be always misunderstood, and never appreciated as she ought to have been. Amidst the pomp and splendour that surrounded her she was lonely; she felt isolated, and though she had found on her arrival in her new country hosts of relatives and courtiers, she had not met one single disinterested friend whom she could trust, or towards whom she could turn for advice and protection. The grandeur of her position put her,

as it were, outside of the world, and, unfortunately, she was so overpowered by this grandeur that she did not even attempt to break through the barriers it had erected around her, and which divided her from the rest of mankind.

CHAPTER III

BIRTH OF GRAND DUCHESS OLGA

The uncomfortable winter which followed upon the marriage of the Czar came at last to an end without his young bride having been much seen in public. The ladies prominent in St. Petersburg society were presented to her during a great reception which she held in the Winter Palace, but this presentation consisted simply in their passing before her with a curtsey, whilst her Mistress of the Robes, the Princess Galitzyne, whispered their names into her ear. She spoke to no one, and of course no one spoke to her, and for the influence that this reception had upon her relations with that society over which she had to preside, it might just as well never have taken place. There were, it is true, a few old ladies whose husbands either had been, or still were, in high official positions, who were received by the Empress in private audience, but these interviews were generally of short duration, and consisted in the exchange of a few banali-

ties in the way of conversation. The Empress did not speak French well, and English at that time was not the fashionable language of the upper class, as is the case at present. Ill-natured people commented on the mistakes made by the young Sovereign in her use of the French idiom, and ridiculed them. She became aware of the fact, and it hurt her deeply, and added to the natural diffidence of her character. In those early days of her married life, Alexandra Feodorovna was striving still for popularity, but doing it in a clumsy, mistaken manner. She felt afraid of being called pro-German, and exaggerated in consequence her manifestations of amiability in regard to everybody and everything that was connected with France, to such an extent that she was accused of want of frankness, not to use a more emphatic word. It was the same thing with her sympathies for the autocratic régime. At the time of her marriage, people hoped that her influence over her husband would result in his granting to Russia that constitution which everybody had been sighing for, for years. But the Imperial family, from the very first hour of her arrival in the country, had repeated to her that it was her duty to uphold the principles

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WINTER PALACE, PETROGRAD

of that autocracy which Alexander III. had so successfully maintained during the whole time of his reign. She accepted this bad advice, and, in her dread of being thought adverse to it, she applied herself to persuade the Czar that he ought to make some public declaration of his intentions to govern according to the principles that had inspired his deceased father. She partly succeeded, but the attempt was not a happy one, because the famous speech of Nicholas II. to the zemstvos, where he affirmed his resolve to govern despotically, and characterised as senseless dreams the aspirations of his people, contributed more than anything else to make him, together with his consort, the most hated and unpopular Sovereign Russia had ever known.

The first winter which saw the Princess Alix transformed into the Empress of All the Russias was, therefore, not precisely what can be called a happy one. In summer the Court went as usual to Peterhof, and the alterations which by this time had begun to be made in the Czarskoi Selo Palace were hastened, because the first accouchement of the young Empress was expected in November, and it had been decided that the expected family

event, so anxiously looked forward to, should take place there.

Alexander Feodorovna herself superintended these alterations. Under her care the old building which had been the favourite residence of Alexander II. and of his consort, that other Hessian Princess who, however, had been both liked and respected by her subjects, was completely transformed. Splendour was banished from it, but the whole place was furnished and arranged in the style of an English cottage, with chintz hangings, plenty of flowers of which the Empress was inordinately fond, and a lot of nick-nacks and photographs that gave it quite a homelike look. Alexandra had admirable taste in all that concerned the inner arrangements of her apartments, and she transformed the old residence of the Russian Czars into a lovely country house, such as one finds in old England or in France. But her ideas in regard to furniture and curtains and general interior ornamentation of the rooms destined for her private use differed so entirely from the accepted Russian notions on the subject that they came to be discussed, not only ill-naturedly, but also disagreeably. She had consulted no one, and had made no secret of

her disapproval of certain things that had been done without her consent, speaking about them with an acrimony she would have done better, for her future peace, to have avoided.

The Emperor, however, was charmed with all that she had done, and delighted at the way in which she had arranged their new residence, to which they moved early in the month of October, 1895. The Empress at once organised her existence upon lines to which she remained more or less faithful all through her reign. She used to rise early, and never failed to breakfast with the Emperor and to accompany him in the walk which he liked to take every morning before settling down to the business of the day. They used to go, in all kinds of weather, for long rambles in the park which surrounded the Palace of Czarskoi Selo, Alexandra Feodorovna dressed in a short sable jacket and a velvet skirt, which she changed for a more elaborate garment when she returned home. She disliked dressing gowns, and the first one I ever saw her wear was during an illness which attacked the Grand Duchess Olga, in the latter's early childhood, when her mother sat up with her at night,

and was persuaded to exchange her tight garments for more comfortable ones.

At eleven o'colck, the Empress' private secretary made his appearance, and brought to her the numerous correspondence that had to be handled. They worked together for an hour or so, and Alexandra more than once tried to interest herself in public charities and to gather knowledge in regard to the various educational establishments in the Empire. These, however, were under the special patronage of the Empress Dowager, who did not brook any interference in the matter, and who applied herself to keep her daughter-in-law quite outside of it. This was a great misfortune because it deprived the latter of considerable interest in her existence, and almost compelled her to spend her time in frivolous occupations for which she did not care. Lunch was served at two o'clock, and was generally a simple meal, though an abundant one, to which guests were seldom invited. After it was over the Emperor remained for an hour with his wife, chatting about the various news of the day, and then they both went out for another walk. Tea was brought to the Empress at five o'clock on a tray in her own room, and she generally swallowed

it in a gulp, without even looking at the cup in which it was contained. She was fond of needlework, and amused herself by making lovely little lace garments for her expected baby. She did not care for the society of her ladies in waiting, whom sometimes she did not see for weeks at a time, during those early days of her marriage. Later on, however, on account of the reproaches that were showered upon her for this neglect of her personal attendants, she had them dine with her and the Emperor on Sundays, and this custom lasted until the Revolution, when it fell into disuse, together with so many other things.

After dinner the Empress used to ensconce herself in a large armchair by the open fire, and again take up her needlework, whilst the Emperor read aloud to her. He was very fond of reading, and read extremely well. He liked historical books better than any others, and followed with considerable interest the different English and French reviews which were regularly sent to him. This lasted until eleven o'clock or thereabouts, when Nicholas II. repaired to his study for a couple of hours' work, whilst the Empress began to undress. I was generally present at this operation,

which was performed by the two maids on duty, who were changed every day. Alexandra had a profusion of beautiful, silky hair, and though she was not so capricious about its treatment as the poor Empress Elizabeth of Austria, yet she liked to have it brushed for half an hour or so, after which it was tightly plaited, and bound with silk ribbon matching the one which trimmed her night-gowns. These were of the finest linen or batiste, profusely ornamented with Valenciennes or Mechlin lace. The dressing jackets and peignoirs of the Empress were generally made out of muslin over silk, with insertions of Brussels net. She was excessively fond of beautiful lingerie, and owned to me one day that one of her greatest pleasures after her marriage had been the possibility of being at last able to indulge in her weakness for it. Her bed sheets were absolutely magnificent, and changed every day, the lace which trimmed them being carefully selected to match that on her night dresses. Madame Barrauld, the great French lingère, who had made the trousseaux of all the smart young girls of St. Petersburg society, was summoned about once a week to Czarskoi Selo, to receive the orders of the Empress in regard to her

lingerie, and that of her daughters when these were born.

In regard to dresses, Alexandra Feodorovna had about fifty for each season, without counting the extras. She was very fond of white gowns, notwithstanding the fact that these did not suit her. But she had been told that it was a Russian custom to wear white garments for every great festival, and she had exaggerated it to such an extent that St. Petersburg society, always on the alert to criticise its new Sovereign, had made fun of it, and its smart leaders of fashion had affected to put on coloured, and even dark dresses, on occasions when previously they would never have thought of so doing. She was supposed to have no taste in her manner of attiring herself, and consequently it was considered the thing to do exactly the contrary of what she was doing, in that matter at least.

The Imperial family did not often come to Czarskoi Selo. At first, the Grand Duchesses, aunts of the Empress, had attempted to see her, without being summoned to her presence; but they had soon found out that between them and her there existed a barrier which it was out of their power to remove. Alexandra Feodorovna was al-

ways civil to them, always received them with a smile, but she nevertheless contrived to make them feel that they bored her, and that she did not care for their visits. The Empress Dowager also had tried to break through her daughter-in-law's reserve, but though the latter had avoided hurting her by showing too openly her dislike to having her solitude intruded upon, yet her stiffness had not encouraged Marie Feodorovna to repeat the attempt of considering her son's home as her own, and of coming and going in and out of it at her will and pleasure.

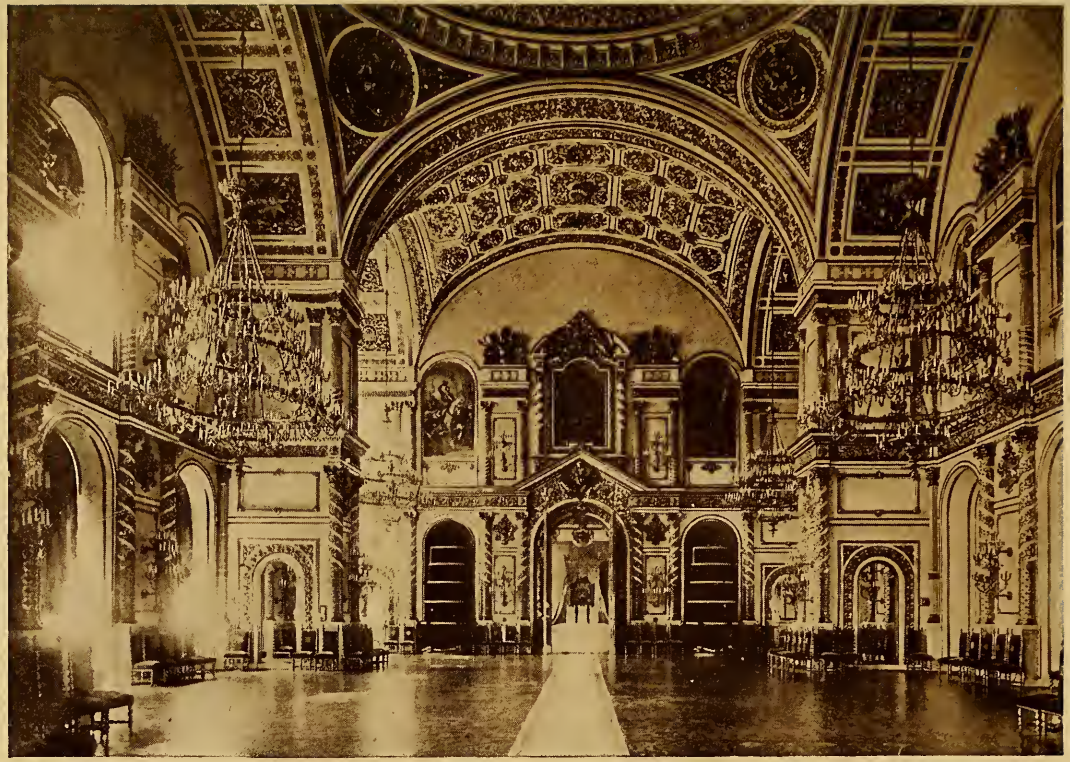
All this caused the conduct of the young wife of Nicholas II. to be severely criticised from almost the first days of her arrival in Russia. Unfortunately for her the choice that had been made of the members of her household had not been a happy one. Her Mistress of the Robes, the Princess Galitzyne, was an intriguing woman, who thought only of her own advantages and the possibility of turning to her use and benefit the high position in which she found herself placed. Her maids of honour were very nice girls, but mostly nonentities, and, if the truth need be told, her husband was not the man capable of being for her the guide she re-

quired during those first days of her married life. The only person whom she saw intimately, and who came in time to acquire a considerable influence over her, was her sister, the Grand Duchess Elizabeth, of whom she had stood more or less in awe during her girlish days, and who abused the privileges due to her as the Empress' senior. And the Grand Duchess was not a wise mentor for the impressionable, impulsive woman who had been raised by destiny to the throne of All the Russias.

With her servants Alexandra Feodorovna never spoke, except in reference to questions concerning their duties. She used to have half an hour's conversation with me in the morning and evening, in regard to matters concerning her dresses or jewels, and gave me her instructions as to what she required to be done in regard to them. But it was only after a number of years, and after I had helped her nurse the young Princesses during an attack of scarlet fever, that the Empress began to talk with me of domestic matters, and of different other things which worried her. She hated familiarity, and firmly believed that it was part of her duties to keep people at a distance. And yet what a kind heart she had! It was sufficient for her to

know that any misfortune had befallen one of her attendants or servants, to show them all the sympathy with which her soul was full. But in normal times she maintained an attitude of reserve that was always misunderstood, and for which she was more than once bitterly reproached.

During that month of November which saw the first anniversary of the Czar's marriage the Court was expecting the birth of the first child of the Imperial pair. All had made up their minds that it was going to be a son, an heir to the vast estates and to the throne of the Romanoffs. The thought that it might be a girl had never crossed the mind either of the nation or of the sovereigns themselves. Preparations without number had been made for the arrival into the world of that much-longed-for boy, and for some days no one had slept in the Palace of Czarskoi Selo. At last the doctors, who for weeks had not left the Imperial residence, were summoned to the bedside of Alexandra Feodorovna. The poor woman had a very hard time, and for long hours her life trembled in the balance, whilst every hope of seeing the child born alive had almost disappeared. Great was the joy, therefore, when its cry was heard for the first time, a joy,



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however, that was turned into an intense disappointment when it was announced that the baby was nothing but a poor little girl, tiny and delicate; a little girl whom no one wanted, and whom no one was prepared to like, except the mother, who took it to her heart with all the tenderness which, though restrained, formed one of the bases of her strange, perhaps not lovable, but altogether admirable character.

CHAPTER IV

THE CORONATION

The christening of the Grand Duchess Olga Nicolaievna was solemnised with great pomp at Czarskoi Selo, after which the Court moved to St. Petersburg, and the young Empress took possession of her new apartments in the Winter Palace. These had been gorgeously fitted up with magnificent silk hangings manufactured in Lyons, and copied from those which adorn the rooms occupied by Marie Antoinette in the Royal Palace of Fontainebleau in France. This had been a surprise of the Czar to his wife, but the latter, instead of being pleased, was superstitiously affected by this remembrance of the unfortunate Queen of France. It has never yet been told that when the Empress was quite a child in London an old gipsy woman whom she had met when walking with her sisters in Richmond Park, had prophesied misfortune to her and to her sister Elizabeth, saying that they would both marry in a distant country, where nothing but

tears and sorrow awaited them. This fact, which she had never forgotten, had more to do than one imagined with that weight of sadness which seemed to be always pressing on Alexandra Feodorovna, though of course she avoided mentioning it.

Nevertheless she tried to shake off the premonitions with which her soul became filled, when she saw the rooms which had been prepared for her, and she applied herself to give them that touch of intimacy which she invariably communicated to all the places where she lived. Big palms were brought in, and put in different corners, and a few valuable pictures were hung on the walls. But the Empress did not care for paintings, and when she was asked whether she would not have a few of those in the Ermitage collection brought to her, as was done in the case of her husband's grandmother, the Empress Marie Alexandrovna, she refused, saying that she did not care to deprive the public of the sight of them. In general, art did not appeal to her, but she read a good deal, and played on the piano with considerable pleasure, without, however, having the talent for music which distinguished her eldest daughter, the Grand Duchess Olga, who became quite an artist later on. It was

the Empress' custom before she began to play to take off her rings, of which she possessed some beautiful specimens, and to throw them on the piece of furniture nearest at hand, forgetting afterwards where she had put them. This sometimes caused considerable annoyance, as they could not always be found immediately, and a frantic search was made all over the Palace, until at last they turned up in some impossible place or other. Among these rings was one containing a beautiful pink diamond, the Empress' engagement ring, which she preferred to all others, and which she constantly wore. Nevertheless she could not, even in the case of this favourite jewel, divest herself of the curious habit of taking it off her finger now and then, and playing with it, as a child might have done, sometimes quite unconscious that she was so doing.

The Empress' piano was a splendid instrument by Erard, and had been a wedding present from her mother-in-law. She preferred it to all the others that she possessed, and when the Court settled at Czarskoi Selo definitely, not returning to the Winter Palace more than for a few hours, she had it removed there, and played on it up to the

time she was sent into that Siberian exile whence perhaps she will never return.

The baptism of the Grand Duchess Olga was the signal for Court festivities to be resumed after the period of mourning for Alexander III. was over. Balls were again given in the Winter Palace, though its young mistress did not much care for dancing, but they were of shorter duration, and not half so lively as those of past times. For one thing the Empress was herself nursing her little daughter, much to the indignation of her relatives, who considered that it was not a befitting thing to do in her position, and she liked to retire early. At all these receptions she was lovely in appearance, and was gorgeously dressed, perhaps too gorgeously, and she certainly made a splendid apparition when she entered a ballroom. But people thought her dull, and found her devoid of that kind of conversation which goes by the name of "small talk." She was far too frank to hide her feelings, and could not bring herself to show herself amused whilst in reality she felt bored. This was noticed, and of course resented. People expect one to be interested in their doings and sayings, and an Empress who hardly ever smiled did not tally with

their estimate of what she ought to have been, so that with one thing and another, the winter season, generally so brilliant in St. Petersburg, and to which one had looked forward eagerly after the sad one which had preceded it, did not prove the success that was expected. Alexandra Feodorovna was fast becoming unpopular, simply because she would not lower herself to the level of those who criticised her so openly and so persistently.

Already in those early days there existed a party against her, which never missed an opportunity to compare her with her mother-in-law, and this not to her advantage. The Dowager had been immensely liked, partly because she had always made it a point to appear to like every one she knew or met. She had not perhaps been more talkative than her daughter-in-law, but she had smiled sweetly and nodded kindly to all her acquaintances, and she had never noticed the shortcomings of her neighbour. Alexandra Feodorovna, on the contrary, was inclined to be satirical, and had a keen sense of humour, that was not destined to add to the pleasures of her existence. She drew most clever caricatures, and was fond of showing them. One day she produced a wonderfully clever sketch of

the Czar, sitting in a baby chair, whilst his mother was scolding him for refusing to take a plate of soup she was handing to him. The drawing passed from hand to hand, and did not contribute towards establishing harmonious relations between the two Empresses, whilst the public was scandalised to see the Czar made fun of by his own wife, who ought to have been the first person to show him respect and deference. All these were but small things, but they constituted the drop of water which ends by wearing away the hardest rock. Many times I wished to warn my mistress of the criticisms to which she willingly lent herself by her manners and conduct, but I never dared; and those who could have done so, like her Mistress of the Robes and her ladies in waiting, did not sufficiently consider her interests to bring to her observation these small matters, which in reality were important ones, in regard to her future comfort and happiness.

What with one thing and another, the unpopularity of the young Sovereign was already an established fact when the Coronation took place at Moscow. It appeared quite plainly on the day she made her public entry into the ancient city, when the crowds greeted her with absolute silence,

whilst they vociferously cheered the Dowager Empress. Alexandra felt this deeply, and when she was alone in her rooms she wept profusely over this manifestation of the displeasure of the nation in regard to her person. It was the first time that I had seen her giving way to grief of any kind, and it affected me very much, especially in view of what was to follow. I had already learnt to love this sweet, gentle lady, who seemed to be pursued with such persistent bad luck, and whose actions were misunderstood by the very people who ought to have appreciated the real motives which guided her. The Empress had a high sense of duty, but a mistaken idea of what it consisted. She was far too desirous of winning the approval of her subjects to set herself to do it in the right way, and besides, she had no one to point out to her the various idiosyncrasies of the Russian nation and of Russian society. She did not wish to go against what she considered to be the national feelings of the people over whom she reigned, and yet she contrived to wound these feelings at almost every step she took.

A terrible example of this occurred during this same Coronation I am talking about. Every one knows the sad accident which was to mar it, and

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which offered an analogy with the one that occurred in Paris during the wedding festivities of Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette. Thanks to the negligence and carelessness of those who ought to have known better, a popular festival which was one of the distinctive features of the whole pageant of the Coronation, ended in dire disaster, and something like twenty thousand people were crushed to death on the Khodinka Field near Moscow. That same night a ball was to take place at the French Embassy. The Ambassador, the Count de Montebello, sent one of his attachés to the Master of the Ceremonies, asking whether he was to postpone it in view of the catastrophe which had taken place in the morning. This official who, with others, had applied himself to keep the Czar in ignorance of the magnitude of the disaster, took it upon himself to reply that there was no reason for this change in the programme, and the Court accordingly repaired to the French Embassy. The young Empress, who had heard from one of her ladies the truth as to what had taken place, was most unhappy at the necessity of appearing in public on the day when such a terrible calamity had overtaken so many people, but she felt afraid to

say what she thought, out of dread that one might think she had seized hold of the first pretext she could find in order to avoid showing herself at the Montebellos. It was already at that time suspected that her sympathies were with the Germans, and she was quite aware of the opinion concerning them and herself. She did not wish to give any further ground for this belief and thus did not follow the instincts of her heart, which would have carried her to the different hospitals where the victims of the morning had been taken. So with sorrow in her soul, and anxiety in her mind, she went to that fatal ball and danced the whole night, though her thoughts were absent from the gay scene of which she was such an unwilling participator.

On her return to the Kremlin she dropped into an easy-chair beside her bed and burst into loud sobs, not heeding my presence or that of her other maids. Not caring for them to witness this explosion of sorrow, I sent them away, and tried to comfort my mistress to the best of my ability, entreating her to control herself, and not to distress the Emperor with the sight of her grief. But Alexandra Feodorovna kept weeping until at last I induced her to repair to the nursery, where the sight

of her little girl sleeping in her cot brought back her composure.

And this was the woman who was represented to be cold and unfeeling, and who was reproached for her utter indifference in presence of a catastrophe of unusual magnitude! Had she but listened to the cry of her own heart, and not always lived in dread of making mistakes and of going against the sympathies of her surroundings, she would certainly have fared much better, and most probably would have been far more liked.

The Coronation was far from the success that had been expected, and the Court returned to Peterhof with a feeling of relief that it was over. A few quiet weeks followed, perhaps the happiest in the whole life of Alexandra Feodorovna, who started then to organise what afterwards turned out to be quite an institution—sewing classes at which she presided, where ladies of society made garments for the poor which were distributed to the latter at Christmas, something like Queen Mary of England's Needlework Guild. This was her first venture in the charitable line, and for some time it proved a successful one, because many ladies entered into the spirit of it, unfortunately

out of interested motives, and because they expected that it would bring them to the Sovereign's notice and thus contribute to the success of their worldly career. But here again the Empress did not realise what lay at the bottom of the willingness with which her appeal was responded to, and she did not show any special favour to the women who had entered into its spirit. These were very soon disgusted at what they called Imperial ingratitude, and at last the sewing classes of Czarskoi Selo came to an end, at least so far as the fashionable world was concerned, because they continued to be frequented by the wives and daughters of the small tradesmen of the Imperial borough, eager to be brought into personal contact with their Czar's wife, and with this new element they prospered and contrived to do a great deal of good. Later on, during the Japanese war, they were transported to the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg, where they remained installed until the Revolution, the present war having given them a new stimulant.

It was during the weeks which immediately followed upon the Coronation that the plans for a series of visits abroad to the different capitals of

Europe were at last settled. It was also then that it was finally decided these visits should include one to the President of the French Republic, an event which, as can be imagined, gave rise to many an animated discussion, and which caused much ink to be spilt in the chanceries and newspaper offices of the whole world, particularly of Europe. The Empress looked forward with apprehension to this journey, but nevertheless prepared herself for it with unusual care. I had never before seen her so interested in regard to the clothes she was to wear, and she sent minute directions to Worth of rue de la Paix fame, who was to be entrusted with the task of making the gowns required for this momentous occasion. Much against her will, however, it was decided that some of the Crown jewels were to be taken along, as it was deemed necessary to display unusual splendour during this trip. This did not please the Empress, in view of the disputes which had arisen between her and her mother-in-law in regard to these same jewels, but she was not allowed to interfere, and both the historic necklace and the tiara of Catherine II. were duly packed and taken. Events proved that the instinct of Alexandra Feodorovna had been a true one, be-

cause St. Petersburg society bitterly reproached her for this infraction of the old Romanoff traditions, which required that the Crown diamonds should not be taken out of Russia, and even the Imperial family criticised this innovation in ancient customs, and made her responsible for it. In reality it was the then Foreign Minister, Prince Lobanoff, who had insisted on the Empress appearing in London, Paris and Vienna, in the full pomp of her Imperial position, and who had raised this question with which Alexandra Feodorovna herself had had nothing to do, beyond submitting to the arrangements which others had made on her behalf. It is thus that history is written.

CHAPTER V

VISITS ABROAD

The beginning of the visits of the young Emperor and Empress to foreign courts was marked by one of those misfortunes which seemed to dog their footsteps wherever they went. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Prince Lobanoff, died suddenly at a railway station where the Imperial train had stopped for a few minutes. He was a man of great ability and wide diplomatic experience, and, moreover, was a staunch friend of the young Empress, who mourned him with all her heart. He would undoubtedly have given her good advice later on, which she often needed, and might have put her on her guard against the insidious counsel which she so often received from people interested in seeing her commit blunder after blunder. His successor, Count Mouravieff, was a protégé as well as a favourite of the Empress's mother, who was responsible for his appointment. He was also a man of unusual ability, but one who knew very

well on which side his bread was buttered, and who was far too worldly wise to attach himself to a woman who, he knew but too well, would never succeed in making herself popular in the country on whose throne she sat.

One of the first visits paid by Nicholas II. and his Consort abroad was to the German Emperor and Empress in the town of Breslau, which had been chosen in order to give a more intimate look to the interview, and to divest it from the more official character it would have had, had it taken place in Berlin. They were received with great pomp. William II. assumed his best manners and tried by all means in his power to make his guests feel comfortable. He was the first cousin of Alexandra Feodorovna and at one time had imagined that he would find in her a staunch ally in his various schemes. But during those first months of her married life the Czarina had learnt another lesson, and that was that she had better avoid meddling with politics. She therefore confined herself to the exchange of banalities with her German cousins, so that the Empress Augusta Victoria afterwards remarked that she had never expected to find "Alix" so very frivolous. The fact is that the young

Czarina had taken great care to be splendidly dressed for the occasion. Worth had sent a special messenger to St. Petersburg to confer with her as to the clothes she would require for this great event: her first appearance as the Empress of All the Russias at Foreign Courts. For the great State dinner which took place in Breslau my mistress wore a gown the tissue of which had been specially woven in Lyons for her, a lustrous white satin brocaded with golden lilies and feathers, the low bodice profusely trimmed with gold lace. In her hair was a diadem of sapphires and brilliants, and on her neck reposed priceless sapphires and pearls, the longest row of which fell down to the bottom of her skirt. She looked truly magnificent, but this splendour was bitterly criticised by the German people, who declared she wanted to impress them with her riches. Another thing which also displeased her hosts was the fact that she had brought her gold toilet service, and caused to be put aside the silver one that had been prepared for her, which out of compliment for her had been specially brought from the Royal Treasury in Berlin. This silver toilet set had belonged to the famous Queen Louise, the mother of William I., and the Kaiser

had imagined that by allowing it to be used by his Russian guest he was paying her a great compliment. When he heard it had been discarded by her he was mortally offended, and even made a cutting remark to that effect, which in her turn she bitterly resented, saying that it seemed to her that her cousin William still thought her the little Hessian Princess of as little importance as she had been before her marriage. All these things might have been avoided with a little tact, and often did I deplore this habit the Czarina had, of impulsively saying things that hurt. I had tried to dissuade her from dragging along with her this heavy toilet set, which, in fact, got her into trouble wherever she went, but she would not listen, and told me that it did not concern me what she had decided, and that I had only to execute the commands given to me, so perforce I had to remain silent. Another whim of the Empress was to carry with her the beautiful lace trimmings of her dressing table. Wherever we went they had to be taken out and adjusted to the table before which she sat to have her hair dressed, and sometimes this caused unnecessary work which exasperated her maids, because all tables were not of the same size, and the lace had to be adjusted un-

der difficulties, as of course it could not be cut. It was point d'Angleterre and Brussels lace, and one of the sets was composed of old Argenton, valued at twenty thousand francs. The set had to be changed every day, and was further ornamented with satin ribbons of different colours, that added to its impression of richness.

Strange to say, the Czarina enjoyed far more her visit to the Vienna Court than the one she had paid to her Berlin cousins. She had always felt curious to know the Empress Elizabeth, and the fact that the latter had consented to come out of her retirement, and to be present at her reception in Vienna, could not but flatter her. Moreover, she felt attracted by the personality of the beautiful Bavarian Princess, whom a sad fate had transformed into a Mater Dolorosa, and the two ladies were from the first sympathetic to each other. By a delicate attention, which I fear no one appreciated, the Czarina had selected a white dress for the State dinner which was given in the Hofburg, and during the whole time she stayed in Vienna, she made it a point not to appear in colours, out of respect for the feelings of the Empress Elizabeth, who never, as long

as she lived, left off her mourning for the Archduke Rudolph.

We also, during this tour, went to Balmoral, where the Empress met her grandmother, Queen Victoria. The old Sovereign had been very kind to this grandchild of hers, ever since the untimely death of her mother, the Princess Alice, and had had her often with her. But this stay at Balmoral was not a success. Perhaps it was hardly possible it could be one, because my mistress' disposition was not one which brooked interference, and Queen Victoria, who had heard, as she generally did all that concerned her immediate family, of the growing unpopularity of the young Czarina, took her to task for it and began advising her as to what she ought to do. The Empress, however, did not accept any advice, thinking that no one outside of Russia could appreciate the growing difficulties of her situation, and, besides, not caring to initiate her grandmother into the various intrigues rampant in the Russian Imperial family. So she received coolly the exhortations of the Queen, and when the two ladies parted it was not as warmly as might have been expected.

Of course the culminating point of the foreign

visits of the Emperor and Empress was Paris. It awaited them with an enthusiasm the like of which the French capital had probably never before seen. From every side one heard cries of "Vive l'Impératrice!" resounding in the air, and the appreciations of the newspapers and of the public were all of them warm and full of sincere admiration. But the Empress, who was in a delicate state of health, did not seem to care for the elaborate programme of festivities which had been planned in her honour, and showed herself more than usually listless and indifferent. She was tired, and besides felt embarrassed at what she considered to be exaggerated expressions of admiration with which she was greeted. She showed it so plainly that somehow the Parisians felt that she did not quite appreciate their efforts to please her, and they began in their turn to criticise her, together with her manners and her dresses. Though Worth had surpassed himself, yet the clothes which he had made for this occasion lacked the true Parisian chic which is required by the gay city. And it began to be whispered that the Czarina did not know how to dress herself, a grave reproach in French eyes. There occurred also another incident which illustrates the want of

tact which so often interfered with the conduct of my Imperial mistress, and which characterised all her entourage and court. The Russian Ambassador, Baron Mohrenheim, gave a luncheon party at the Embassy to which he invited the leaders of that part of French society called the Faubourg St. Germain. Among those who responded to his appeal were the Duchesses de Luynes and d'Uzes, the Countess Aimery de la Rochefoucauld, and the Duchesse de Doudeauville. The Czarina had been told that these ladies were not in favour in Republican circles, and she felt afraid to show them any attention which might be interpreted as a desire to please the enemies of the Régime which was welcoming her. She consequently allowed them to be presented to her, but spoke but a few words to them, and showed herself so cool in regard to them that of course she gave grave offence, and Baron Mohrenheim was told that his *"Impératrice n'était pas aimable."*

Of course a woman with a little experience of the world might have known how to conciliate the different elements with which she was brought in contact. But Alexandra Feodorovna was not a diplomat, and, moreover, never could hide her feelings.

She thus contrived to wound those whom, perhaps, in her secret heart she was most anxious to please.

The little Grand Duchess Olga had accompanied her parents during these visits, and notwithstanding the many things she had to do, and the numerous calls upon her time, my mistress never forgot to be present at her child's undressing in the evening, and had her brought to her room the first thing in the morning. I generally wakened the Czarina at eight o'clock, when I would hand her a lace and silk morning jacket, which was brought to me by the maid on duty, and then she would ask for her daughter, with whom she played for half an hour or so before glancing at the morning's papers and taking the cup of tea which she liked in the morning. It had to be very strong and bitter, and she never took sugar or cream with it. When she was dressed she used to partake, with the Emperor, of an English breakfast, which, after having been fixed for half-past nine o'clock, was, later on, partaken of much earlier, so as not to interfere with the children's lessons. The Empress was fond of eggs, and of a certain crisp kind of bacon, such as was generally found at Windsor or Balmoral, or any of the residences of Queen Victoria. She was,

in general, very English in her tastes, and English was the only language used in the Russian Imperial family circle. This attention of Alexandra Feodorovna to her daughter was of course praised in Paris as well as in London, but not appreciated as it ought to have been in St. Petersburg, where it was said that she would have done better to have been less of a good mother, and more of an Empress. The Imperial family especially criticised it freely, and called her a Mere Gigogne in derision. When one daughter after another was born to her, these criticisms became even more acute, and it was said that she wasted all her time looking after little girls whose existence was of no interest at all to the Russian Empire.

I must here relate a fact that, so far as I know, has never been made public. After the Coronation the Empress, owing to over-fatigue, had an accident which destroyed some hopes of maternity she was nursing. She had not spoken of her condition in her family, and she told me that she felt very glad she had not done so, because most probably she would have been accused of some imprudence or other, the more so that her doctor said that the expected child would, in all probability, have been a

boy. Nevertheless the thing somehow came to the knowledge of the public in the sense that it was suspected, though no one knew for a certainty whether it was true or not, that such an accident had taken place, and with the usual wickedness of humanity, it was rumoured that the Sovereign had had reasons to hide the condition she found herself in, and that the accident in itself had been brought on more voluntarily than accidentally. I was one day asked whether these sayings which circulated freely in St. Petersburg were true or not. Imagine my indignation and anger on hearing my beloved mistress accused of so terrible a thing, the accusation having not the slightest foundation to justify it. When later on my Imperial mistress began to honour me with her confidence, I implored her whenever she thought she had reasons to suppose that she was about to become again a mother, to mention the fact at once, and give it as much publicity as possible. But she was so persistently pursued by bad luck that this also proved later on a source of much trouble to her, when she happened to be attacked by an illness which was at first attributed to a condition that in reality did not exist.

When we returned to St. Petersburg after this triumphant (for such it was considered to have been) journey abroad, we were welcomed there with more effusion than had been even expected. The French alliance was becoming very popular, and the Russian nation moreover felt flattered at the idea that its Sovereigns had been made so much of wherever they had been. We went at first to Czarskoi Selo and then moved for the winter season to the capital, where the Empress, as usual, received the ladies of society after mass on New Year's day, after which began the usual round of gaieties that made St. Petersburg such an attractive town at the time I am writing about. But instead of the seven or eight balls generally given during the winter, the Empress arranged to give only four, varied with four theatrical performances in the little theatre of the Ermitage Palace, which had been built by the Empress Catherine. These performances, which were always composed of classical pieces, were declared to be dull, and people found one excuse or another to absent themselves from them, thus beginning the system of boycotting which, later on, was extended to all the Empress'

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OLD BANQUET HALL OF THE CZARS

entertainments. She was voted a bore and no criticism could have been worse, considering the existing state, together with the habits and customs, of the society of the Russian capital.

CHAPTER VI

THE GRAND DUCHESS ELIZABETH

At the risk of rousing a storm of indignation against me, I must say that one of the misfortunes of the Czarina was to have in Russia an elder sister already married to a Russian Grand Duke. I know that it is an established legend that the Grand Duchess Elizabeth is a saint, who ought to have been canonised in her lifetime. But, in reality, things were not as represented. The Grand Duchess was a very ambitious woman, and moreover one who cared for nothing and for nobody in the world with the exception of her own self. In spite of the report that her marriage was a very miserable one, she was on the contrary perfectly happy with her husband, who was quite content to let her live her own life, and who never interfered with anything it might please her to do. When he was appointed Governor General of Moscow, she hastened to go over to the Greek Church, in order to win for herself popularity in the ancient capital of the Rus-

sian Czars, and to a certain extent she succeeded in doing so. She took advantage of her position as eldest sister of the young Czarina to try to influence her, and to prejudice her against those people of whom she thought she had personally reason to complain. The weakness of the character of Nicholas II. was well known to his family, long before he ever ascended the throne, and both the Grand Duke Sergius, who, let it be said by the way, was an exceedingly clever man, and his wife made up their minds to rule Russia through the influence of its new Empress, and to become the only really important personages in the State. They partly succeeded, and this was the cause of most of the misfortunes which were later on to assail the unfortunate Czarina.

The latter, in spite of her impetuous and, if the truth need be said, haughty disposition, stood in awe of her eldest sister, a feeling out of which the Grand Duchess Elizabeth knew very well how to make capital. She set herself to persuade her sister that it was indispensable she should affect a far stronger attachment to the orthodox faith than she really professed, and that if only the orthodox clergy should think they had found in her an energetic

support, she would rapidly become popular. It must not be forgotten that at that time the influence of priests in general was fast waning, and that they were aware of the fact. It is not surprising, therefore, that they tried to find a ally among the Imperial family, and that the Grand Duchess Elizabeth, who made a profession of being absorbed in the practices of a narrow devotion, became the object of their pet affection. She was quite conscious of this fact, and being a far cleverer woman than she looked, she used it to her own advantage and to the detriment of her sister.

Elizabeth Feodorovna had the reputation of being a semi-saint. In reality she was nothing of the kind, for she liked the bad as well as the good things of this world to an inordinate degree. Fond of admiration, she had not been insensible to the one which she inspired, and her admirers had been many, to begin with her own husband's brother, the Grand Duke Paul. But she had carried all her intrigues in a grand manner, and had never allowed them to interfere with the general comfort of her existence. Worldly to her finger tips, she yet affected the manners of an unworldly woman, and she "took in" most of those with whom she came

into contact by her hypocrisy, for it could hardly be called anything else.

At heart she was jealous of her sister, just as she had been jealous of the Empress Marie Feodorovna, during the latter's reign. It was for this reason principally that she had been so glad to go to Moscow, where she knew she would be the first lady in the town, and would enjoy a semi-Imperial position. She did not care to see any one put before her, and she applied herself to render the young Czarina unpopular by every means in her power.

Of course the unfortunate Alexandra Feodorovna, who knew nothing about Russia and still less about Russian society when she married, believed all that her sister told her, and the latter gave her a totally false opinion as to most of the people whom she saw, or with whom she was thrown into contact—the Empress Dowager to begin with, and all the other members of the Imperial family. Among the latter the young Czarina might have found friends but too happy to guide her, such for instance as her own sister-in-law, the Grand Duchess Xenia, who was about her own age, and who would have been only too glad to be of use to her. But the latter's husband, the Grand Duke Alex-

ander Michaylovitsch, was credited with ambitious designs, and was moreover one of the most intelligent men of his day. This was more than sufficient to eliminate him from the number of the people whom it was deemed expedient for Alexandra Feodorovna to see much of.

I shall quote one instance of the kind of influence which the Grand Duchess Elizabeth exercised over her sister. One day the Empress came to me and told me (this happened during the war) that her sister had sent her some relics of a famous saint in the Orthodox Church, who was buried in the cathedral of Rostoff on the Don, telling her at the same time that she ought to have them dissolved in water and then drink this water early in the morning before she had partaken of any other food. Should she do so, success would come to the Russian arms without fail. The poor Empress was torn asunder between her conviction that her duty required her to obey her sister and her distaste for the abominable beverage she was expected to swallow. I tried my best to persuade her that the whole thing was nonsense, but then Rasputin, who was one of the instruments of the Grand Duchess Elizabeth, interfered, and, after much hesitation,

the unfortunate Czarina at last made up her mind to drink the dirty relics as she had been ordered, and, as a consequence, was abominably sick.

It was also Elizabeth Feodorovna who was responsible for the introduction of Rasputin into the immediate circle of the Imperial family. Before that she had presented to her sister a Frenchman, called Philippe, who was supposed to be one of the first mediums in Europe, and for a short time this Philippe was quite an important personage at Court. It was about the time the Japanese war broke out, and the intriguing Frenchman did his best to consolidate his influence and power, by making all kinds of prophecies as to the course the struggle was about to take. Events, however, gave the lie to his predictions, because instead of the brilliant successes which he had prophesied, defeat attended the course of the campaign, and the Russian armies were routed. This shook the reputation of the medium, and, finally, after another failure of a private nature (he had promised the Empress she would give birth to a son in the course of the next six months, which did not happen) he was dismissed, principally at the request of the Grand Duke Nicholas, who called upon the Czar and re-

vealed to the latter the many intrigues of which Philippe had been guilty. When he was gone the Empress spent her time turning tables alone or with a few chosen friends, and she at last got her nervous system into such a condition that it is no wonder she fell an easy prey to Rasputin when the latter was presented to her by her sister, with the assurance that he was one of the greatest saints the Russian Orthodox Church had ever known.

This influence of the Grand Duchess Elizabeth was exercised not only in religious and political matters, but also in purely frivolous ones. For instance, she introduced into the Imperial Palace a dressmaker from Moscow who used to make her own gowns, and to whom she had promised she would procure the Empress as a client. This dressmaker, who, I have always felt convinced was a German spy, became quite an important personage at Court, and soon my mistress did not dare to order a gown from any one else but this woman. This of course caused great dissatisfaction among her former modistes, both in Petrograd and in Paris, who, after having enjoyed her patronage for a number of years, found it hard to be set aside for a newcomer. I tried more than once to remon-

strate and to urge the expediency of not offending former friends, if such an expression can be used in the like case, but I was immediately silenced, with the result that the Empress spent twice as much on her clothes as she had done during the first years of her marriage and was dressed with much less taste. Under the pretext that she ought to wear Russian silks, gowns of inferior materials were made for her, and made abominably into the bargain. This was the more shameful that Moscow possesses silk manufactories, the produce of which is not a bit inferior to the loveliest French silks, but my poor mistress never got the chance to have them, and the cheapest and most vile satin and velvets were those which her famous Moscow dressmaker selected for her. Worth, who for years had had the privilege of making the dresses of the Russian Empresses, became very angry at the neglect with which his offers were treated, and soon the Empress came to be called stingy, not only in St. Petersburg but also in Paris, where proprietors of the many establishments where she had formerly got her clothes became her enemies, and took to calling her German, for the only reason that she did not any longer buy her dresses and other things from them. It

would have been easy to avoid all this had one been possessed of a strong and independent will and not set trembling, as my poor mistress was, whenever her sister swept down upon her with a complaint or in an excitement of some kind or another. .When the little Grand Duchesses grew up, their aunt also interfered with their education. She believed herself to be an excellent pedagogue, and was convinced that she had brought up admirably the two motherless children of her brother-in-law, the Grand Duke Paul, Dmitry and Marie, who was later on to become the wife of a Swedish Prince from whom she was divorced a short time afterwards. In reality she had done nothing of the kind, and neither the nephew nor the niece over whose childhood she was supposed to have watched with such care, did her any honour, nor proved in any way the excellence of the training which she was supposed to have given them. In regard to the children of the Czar and of the Czarina, her influence proved quite mischievous, and might have become even dangerous if the strong common sense of the two eldest girls had not saved them from the danger of the superstitious atmosphere with which their aunt wanted to surround them.

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RASPUTIN

The Empress was the best and most tender of mothers. Indeed her affection for her children was almost too fervent, for she was always anxious on their account and would hardly ever allow them to mix with other people for fear of anything evil befalling them. She thought, quite naturally, that she could trust her sister and share with her the responsibilities of the education of her family. In reality she could not have made a worse choice, because between ambition and superstition the Grand Duchess Elizabeth was about the last person who ought to have been permitted free access to girls of the impressionable temperament of the young daughters of Nicholas II.

CHAPTER VII

THE CZARINA'S FAMILY RELATIONS

The Empress, like all German Princesses, had been brought up in a family atmosphere which had a great deal of the bourgeois about it. Her father had been comparatively a poor man, and his household had been conducted on most modest lines, as can be seen from the letters of the Czarina's mother, the Grand Duchess Alice of Hesse, addressed to her own mother, Queen Victoria. Neither pomp nor magnificence had presided over the rearing of the young Princesses left motherless so soon, and it was only at Windsor and at Balmoral that Princess Alix had seen what a Sovereign's existence meant. But on the other hand she had been very happy with her sisters and with her brother to whom she was particularly attached. For some years after their father's death she had been practically the mistress of his household, and she had felt bitterly his marriage with their cousin, the Princess Victoria Melita of Saxe-Coburg. The latter,

whose mother was a Russian Grand Duchess, had, in her own way, just as imperious a character as her sister-in-law, and soon relations between the two girls became more than strained. As is well known, the marriage of the Grand Duke of Hesse turned out a most unhappy one and ended with a divorce in which the Princess Alix sided with her brother, and allowed the latter's wife to see that such was the case. Tnis brought about a family quarrel, which was further accentuated by the re-marriage of Victoria Melita with her other cousin, the Grand Duke Cyril of Russia, which incensed the Empress to such a degree that she used all her influence over the Czar to persuade the latter to exile Cyril and his bride, and to deprive them of their fortune and rank at the Russian Court. This was a most unfortunate action, because it roused against the Czarina the wrath of all her relatives, who already did not like her, and who in consequence went over to swell the ranks of her enemies, alas, already too numerous.

I have always regretted that my Imperial mistress was not able to make for herself friends among her own relatives. This partiality which she always exhibited in regard to her Hessian connections was

a very unfortunate one, and added certainly to her unpopularity. Had she been wise, she might easily have found a warm support in the Czar's sister, the Grand Duchess Xenia, and the latter's husband, whose kind feelings in regard to her would have secured for her the allegiance of all the sons of the Grand Duke Michael, the great uncle of the Czar, and the most respected member of the Romanoff family, as well as the oldest. Unfortunately she did not see the necessity for doing so, and she feared the influence undoubtedly exercised at one time over the Czar's mind by Xenia, his favourite sister. Consequently she kept her at arm's length, and avoided inviting her to Czarskoi Selo. The Imperial family, finding itself snubbed at every step, boycotted in its turn their Empress, with the result that the latter drifted every day a little farther from those who ought to have been her natural friends and supporters.

The Grand Duchess Vladimir, herself a German Princess and by birth a Duchess of Mecklenburg, had at one time been the one to whom Alexandra Feodorovna had been the most attracted, and a certain intimacy had even established itself between them. Then one day the Princess, when calling on

her niece, had found established in her room one of the numerous nuns with whom the latter liked to surround herself and who had been presented to her by her sister Elizabeth. She had made a few remarks as to inadvisability of an Empress of Russia admitting into such close intimacy an uneducated woman, who, moreover, was probably like all Russian nuns, devoted to gossip. These remarks were very badly received and put an end to a friendship that, in spite of the many inconveniences it presented (the Grand Duchess Vladimir being an active supporter of the Kaiser and of the German party at Court), would still have been preferable to the one which continued to persist between Alexandra Feodorovna and any amount of ignorant monks and nuns whose society she grew at last to prefer to that of everybody else. This, however, was not saying much, because as time went on my mistress developed more and more this unfortunate love for solitude for which she was so often, and not unjustly, reproached. She had a great defect for a woman in her high position—that of taking life too seriously, in the sense that she would never admit that any one had the right to seek amusement or relaxation from the duties of one's

daily existence. Indeed she looked out for duties, and found some where none existed. She hated balls, and society she thoroughly despised, believing that it was composed of frivolous and ill-natured people. She did not care for innocent pleasures, not because she had any preference for others, but because she was convinced that every single hour of any man's or woman's existence ought to be consecrated to duty or occupation of some kind. When she was compelled to appear at a ball or State function, she did so with such a bored look that it could not fail to be noticed and of course was resented. Her greatest happiness would have been to lead an out-of-doors life, to take long walks, and to play tennis or golf as a relaxation. Even her readings were always serious ones, and such a thing as a novel was never seen in her apartments. Sometimes her sisters-in-law would urge upon her the necessity of reading such or such a book, whose publication had created some kind of stir in the world. But she invariably refused, or if she consented did so under protest, and would later on make scathing remarks as to her aversion for such kind of literature. The Czar, on the other hand, liked to peruse a good novel, and sometimes at-

tempted to read the contents of one aloud to his wife, when she would listen with a bored look on her face, but would not, however, express in any other way her disapproval. She was very considerate for her husband, though in the early days of their marriage she had been inclined to show too much her influence and power over his mind, which was also one of the things Russian society had not forgiven her. One incident in particular had aroused the ire of the Empress Dowager, who had made no secret of her indignation against her young daughter-in-law on the subject. The Czar and his wife had accepted an invitation to dine and spend the evening at the barracks of the Hussar regiment, of which the Emperor, when heir to the throne, had been in command. Nicholas II. was enjoying himself, as he invariably did when amidst his old comrades of former times, but the Empress was far from doing so, therefore, when eleven o'clock struck, she determined she had had quite enough of it, and, calling to her husband, said loudly and distinctly in English: "Now come, my boy, it is time to go to bed!" One may imagine the horror of the assistants on hearing the autocrat of All the Russias addressed in public as "my boy" by his

imprudent wife. The incident was widely commented upon and discussed, and Marie Feodorovna thought it her duty to remonstrate with her daughter-in-law on the subject, saying that she had never ventured to address Alexander III. in presence of others, let alone in an official occasion such as this one had been, otherwise than as "Sir" or "Your Majesty." My mistress took these remonstrances in very bad part, and the relations between the two ladies did not improve after this affair.

Had Alexandra Feodorovna been surrounded by people who wished her well, they would have tried to educate her mind, and to bring to her notice the necessity of observing certain details pertaining to etiquette of which she had never been taught the necessity in her small Darmstadt, but which she could not neglect in her position as Empress of Russia. Kindness would have done wonders with her, and no one would have appreciated it more than herself, but opposition of any kind had the effect of exasperating her and of driving her to do precisely what she ought not to have done. She had the idea that as the wife of an autocratic ruler she was placed above every kind of criticism, and that no one dared to make any remark concerning her

conduct or manners. Of course this was a mistaken idea, but it had so thoroughly taken hold of her mind that nothing could ever drive it away, and it has certainly contributed to the misfortunes which have assailed her later on. Alas! alas! how often have I not regretted that this sweet Princess, so attractive in many ways, could not be brought to look upon the world with other eyes than those of an enemy. If only she had believed those who sincerely loved her, how different her life might have been!

During the summer of 1898, the Grand Duchess Olga caught the scarlet fever. The English nurse who was in charge of the Imperial nursery was left with the second little girl who had been born to the Czar and Czarina, the Grand Duchess Tatiana, and the Empress took it upon herself to nurse the sick child unaided. I begged permission to share with her the care of the invalid, and it was after this that my mistress began to confide in me to a certain degree, and to speak to me about some of her many anxieties and sorrows. I can remember her so well during these days and nights sitting by the cot in which her small daughter slept, clad in a dressing gown of

white flannel which I had almost compelled her to buy for the occasion, her fair head resting on her hand, absorbed in her thoughts, and with that sweet but anxious expression on her beautiful face, which already at that time had begun to settle on her features. She complained to me once that she had been reproached by her relatives for exposing herself to the danger of contagion. "As if that mattered," she said, "even if I died, for the Emperor would always find another wife who perhaps would be luckier than I have been, and able to give him an heir. No one would miss me, with the exception perhaps of these children," and she started weeping bitter tears. I tried to comfort her, saying that she must not talk in that way, because no woman had ever been more loved by her husband than she was by the Emperor. "Ah, my dear," retorted the Empress, "what good does it do me to be loved by my husband when all the world is against me? It is the nation's love I would wish to win, and how can I hope to do so, so long as I have not given an heir to Russia!" Poor woman, she really imagined that the cause of her unpopularity was the fact that she had no son!

This reminds me of the state of mind into which

my poor mistress was thrown at the birth of her second daughter, Tatiana. She had been worrying the whole time of her pregnancy at the idea that she might have another girl, until at last the thought of it had become quite an obsession, and her nervous system had been absolutely shattered as a consequence. When the child came into the world there was a profound silence in the room, and the doctor informed the Czar, by a previously arranged sign, of the sex of the infant, which it was deemed necessary to conceal from the mother at first. But the Empress saw the anxious and troubled faces around her when she had recovered from the effects of the chloroform which had been administered to her, and her first words were: "My God, it is again a daughter. What will the nation say, what will the nation say?" and she burst into loud hysterics.

Nevertheless, the wee, wee maidens who came one after the other to enliven the family circle of the Czar and Czarina, though they were very badly received, became in time the objects of their parents' most affectionate love, and were cared for just as much as if their births had not constituted a severe disappointment for their father and mother.

But the fact that for something like ten years Russia had no direct heir, shook the position of Alexandra Feodorovna, who began to be considered as a person of no consequence. People looked up to the Grand Duke Michael, in whom every one saw the future Czar, and who not only was immensely popular, but whose features and character reminded one more than those of any of his other children of the late Alexander III. The Empress was quite aware of this fact, and it did not contribute to her liking for her brother-in-law. In general, she was not upon good terms with any members of the Russian Imperial family, with the exception of her sister of course, and of the latter's husband, the Grand Duke Sergius, and she clung more than ever to her German relations, and to her brother in particular. She was always looking forward to the short sojourns which from time to time she was allowed to make in Darmstadt, where she felt more at her ease than anywhere else, with the exception of Livadia, in the Crimea, where she built for herself a kind of fairy palace, in place of the small cottage which had been found sufficient for the Empress Marie Alexandrovna, and where Alexander III. had breathed his last. The construction of this palace was also

one of the things for which my mistress was reproached. People said that it was not seemly to have pulled down the house where the late Czar had died, and they had criticised the large amount of money which had been wasted, as was said, on the erection of this new residence. When this was repeated to the Empress, she became quite furious, and swore that not one of those who had thus allowed themselves to be dissatisfied with what she had done would ever enter the gates of her Crimean home. She kept her promise, and not even her mother-in-law was ever invited to look upon the new castle which Alexandra Feodorovna had built for herself on the shores of the Black Sea, and which she had made so beautiful.

CHAPTER VIII

LIFE AT CZARSKOI SELO

I HAVE often been asked details about the kind of existence by the Imperial family in the interior of their home. So long as I was in their service I never spoke of what I saw, and in general avoided mentioning anything connected with the family life of my masters. It seems to me now that I am not committing an indiscretion if I do so, because I have nothing to say but good of the unfortunate Czar and Czarina.

They were a most affectionate couple, and to look at them and to hear them converse with one another one could almost have believed them to be little "bourgeois" of the type dear to French authors, rather than powerful sovereigns. They used often to jest together, and to tease each other in a quiet way, and both were full of fun when left to themselves. Later on, of course, things changed, and as the political horizon became darker and darker, the old merry laugh with which the Emperor and

his wife used to make the halls and corridors of the Czarskoi Selo Palace echo was hushed and could be heard very seldom. But the sense of humour of Nicholas II. and of his Consort never deserted them, and they were inclined to look at the joyful side of things rather than to indulge in pessimism, in all matters that did not pertain to the administration of their vast Empire. This was the tragic part of their life, and, being both highly conscientious people, they suffered cruelly to find that all their efforts to ameliorate the condition of their people were misunderstood. Of course it is idle to deny that the weakness of character of the Emperor was greatly to blame in the series of disasters which finally overpowered him and his family, but it must also be acknowledged that he never met with any sincere and disinterested help in the responsibilities of his arduous task. During the first years of her marriage the Empress kept, or rather was kept, aloof from everything connected with politics, which was a great pity, because at that time she might have made herself useful in many ways. But all the ministers and the advisers of Nicholas II. were of opinion that his wife had to be relegated to a subordinate position, and he himself had no desire

to initiate her into the complicated details connected with the government of Russia. It was only after she had given birth to an heir that the position of Alexandra Feodorovna became an important one, and that she was consulted by her husband. By that time the reputation for weakness of character of the Emperor had become an established fact, and those who hitherto had ruled him, furious at finding themselves evicted, started the report that the Empress was abusing her influence over the Czar, and obliging him to conform himself to her own political views, which were supposed to be entirely German.

So far as I have been able to judge, this was an error, at least in some details. The Czarina was very fond of the land of her birth, this cannot be denied, but she was too affectionate a mother not to see that it would have been impossible to carry on a purely German policy in Russia, and the thing to which she clung the most was her throne and the possibility of seeing her own son occupy it in time. She was ambitious for him as well as for herself, and though this may be deplored, yet there is nothing astonishing in the fact.

She did not care for St. Petersburg and the lux-

ury of her apartments in the Winter Palace, and after the Japanese war and the Revolution she persuaded the Czar to give up residing there and to make his permanent home at Czarskoi Selo, or in Livadia in the Crimea. They used to come sometimes to the capital for some military festivity or other, but their sojourn there was always of short duration, and never extended beyond a few hours. The only time they resided in it again, and this only for three days, was on the occasion of the celebration of the jubilee of three hundred years of the accession of the Romanoff dynasty to the throne of Russia. After they left it then, they were never more to sleep under its roof, though their rooms were always kept ready for them. Sometimes the Empress stopped there for a cup of tea, when on one of her rare visits to St. Petersburg, to inspect some charitable institution, but she never liked them, though she had furnished them with such care and she never felt at home in those immense halls which could not be made homely or comfortable, in the sense generally attached to this word.

At Czarskoi Selo existence ran very smoothly. The Empress rose early and, after partaking of a

cup of tea in bed, threw a dressing gown over her shoulders, and repaired to her children's rooms. She was always present when they said their prayers, and she used to read to them a chapter of the Bible, or the Gospel for the day. It was only after the performance of this duty that she began her own toilet, which was always an elaborate affair, and this to the last day of my stay with her, even after she had discarded most of her ornaments and fine gowns and assumed the garb of the sister of charity she declared she had become. But she was particular in the care she used to take of her own person and would spend a longer time than any one else would have done in her bath and in the general occupation of her dressing and undressing. After her hair had been arranged and she had assumed the gown she chose out of the three or four which were brought for her inspection, she would go to the small apartment where breakfast was served, and where her children were generally already awaiting her. A servant would then inform the Emperor that his wife was in the dining room, and he would join her there almost immediately. The meal never began without him, and was a simple though an abundant one. Eggs, cold meat, and a variety of

cakes and biscuits with hot rolls, generally composed it. Nicholas II. was a gourmet, and though he cared most for Russian cooking, yet he insisted on everything that was served him being of the very best. Lunch was the meal of which he partook most freely, and it consisted always of some five or six courses, beginning with caviar and other relishes, and ending with fresh fruit, no matter what the season of the year might be, and very strong coffee. The Czar was a most sober man in his family circle, contrary to what has been said of him, and his only drink was Crimean wine from his own vintages, which was very good indeed. Sometimes, when he went to supper at the mess of his former regiment of Hussars, of which he had remained very fond, he partook freely of champagne, which started the legend that he was an inordinate drunkard, but these occasions were rare, and certainly never gave rise to any outward manifestation on his part which might have accredited this malicious report. Strong drinks never appeared on the Imperial table. Nicholas II. drank a small glass of vodka before his meals, as every Russian does, but this was all. As for the Empress, she seldom touched anything but mineral water, and the children were brought

up on strictly abstemious lines. During dinner, which was served at eight o'clock, Madeira and sherry appeared, also red and white wine, but this was for the benefit of the guests invited. There were always some at this meal, but these comprised the ladies in waiting on the Empress, and the personal attendants on the Emperor, rarely any one else. Sometimes a military band played some of the Czarina's favourite airs, when she would listen with attention, but this seldom occurred except on Sundays. The dinner was an elaborate affair, composed principally of Russian dishes, for Nicholas II. disliked French sauces and French menus, and used to say that what he preferred was plain and excellent Russian fare. The kind of fish called Sterlet was a favourite of his, also a pudding which went by the name of Gourieswkaya Kacha, or gruel, and which was really very good. The Empress was absolutely indifferent to what she ate or drank, and would have been perfectly satisfied to exist on oatmeal and eggs. The only thing she was particular about was her tea, which she wanted to be made very strong, and the brand she preferred was one in which green tea was mixed with black;

she utterly repudiated Indian or Ceylon tea, giving her preference to Chinese caravan.

As the Imperial children grew up, their mother adopted the custom of spending most of her time with them when the state of her health so allowed. She had always been very delicate, and developed violent nervous headaches which totally prostrated her and confined her to her bed in a dark room, sometimes for two or three days at a time. These attacks left her terribly weak, and she would require care and quiet to get over them. Sometimes another attack would overpower her before the effects of the first one had passed away. This was the origin of the rumour that she was an unnatural mother who for days did not allow her daughters to approach her. Nothing of the kind ever took place, but when my poor mistress was laid up her sufferings were so intense that sometimes the sound of a footstep in the next room would add to the agony which she endured, and of course she had to be left alone at such periods. But the world, always cruel and unjust in regard to her, would have it that she confined herself in her apartments because she could not bear her children, and it pitied them in consequence.

But when she was in good health, the Czarina gave up every minute of her time to her family. She took upon herself the religious instruction of her son and daughters, and she tried to rear them in the strong principles which she herself professed. Both the Czar and herself observed with extreme punctuality the rites of the Greek Orthodox Church. During the whole six weeks of Lent, no meat appeared on the Imperial table, and at festivals as well as on Sundays, the whole family attended all the morning and afternoon services which were celebrated in the chapel of the Palace. Afterwards the Empress built a church in Czarskoi Selo, which became one of the most beautiful shrines in the whole of Russia, and she regularly went to it, forsaking the private chapel of her own residence. She had arranged for herself an oratory in one corner of the building, from which she could, unseen herself, follow the religious services. This eccentricity, which proceeded from the fact that the Czarina did not care to be the object of the attention of the congregation, was also made the cause of violent and unseemly attacks upon her person and character.

When the state of her health allowed her to do so, Alexandra Feodorovna went for long walks in

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THE EX-CZARINA OF RUSSIA AND HER FOUR DAUGHTERS

the park surrounding the Palace, with the Emperor and her children. She was inordinately fond of the open air, and was never so happy as in the Crimea, where she could indulge in her taste for it. There she spent hours arranging her rose garden and generally beautifying this lovely place, to which she hoped she would one day be able to retire. It is not generally known, but a fact, that both the Emperor and herself nursed the idea of abdicating in favour of their son as soon as the latter should be old enough to assume the government of the country, and of retiring to Livadia for the rest of their days. Neither Nicholas II. nor his Consort ever dreamt that this abdication would be imposed upon them by events the magnitude of which no one in the whole of Russia could have been able to foresee.

Very few visitors ever came to enliven the solitude of Czarskoi Selo, but at Livadia the Empress would make a point of inviting to dinner and to small dances given for her daughters, all the people living in the neighbourhood, or staying in the various hotels on the Crimean coast, who had been presented to her. The officers of the Imperial yacht, the *Standard,* were also bidden to these parties, and they were almost the only persons with whom the

Empress ever conversed freely. She was very fond of the sea, and during the cruises which she took every summer in the Finnish waters she grew to know by name all the crew of the vessel on which she found herself, and she took pleasure in talking with the officers and men, the former of whom were afterwards always welcomed by her wherever she was.

But in general she did not care for society. Her Mistress of the Robes was about the only woman admitted to her intimacy as long the post was occupied by the Princess Galitzyne, but after the death of the latter and the appointment of Madame Narischkine, the relations of the Empress with the head of her household became purely formal, and the only real confidante she possessed during the last six or seven years which preceded the war and the Revolution was a woman who was destined to do her an infinity of harm and whom she would have done much better to have kept at arm's length —the too famous Madame Wyroubieva, about whom I shall have something to say later on.

CHAPTER IX

THE COURT AND ATTENDANTS OF THE CZARINA

When the Empress married, her household was formed in a hurry, which was a great pity, because it was not composed entirely of the best people from an intellectual point of view. The Empress Dowager was so absorbed by her grief that she could not give to the subject the attention she otherwise would have done. The Emperor, on the other hand, knew very little about St. Petersburg society, and especially about its gossip. When the name of the Princess Galitzyne was mentioned to him as that of the best lady for the difficult position of Mistress of the Robes, and chief adviser of his young wife, he accepted it as a matter of course, having only in mind the great name and the prominent position of the Princess.

She was a woman with a past in which had figured most of the *jeunesse dorée* of St. Petersburg. She had been married when quite a girl to a man

much older than herself, and had very rapidly found a number of people willing to console her for the great difference of age which existed between her and her spouse. He had made her an indulgent husband, and by reason of his great standing, riches, and other worldly advantages, had constantly sheltered her from the evil effects of the gossip which was but too often busy with her name. When she had become a widow, she had mourned him quite sincerely, but had pretended a grief greater than she had really experienced. It was discovered that he had left his business affairs in an entangled condition, and the Princess had retired to her country estates, to try to bring some kind of order into their management. She had an only daughter, already married, who became the object of her greatest care and affection. When the post of chief adviser to the young bride of Nicholas II. was offered to her by one of her former admirers, Baron Fredericks, then already Minister of the Imperial Household, she had snatched at the chance with alacrity, seeing in it a possibility of re-establishing, quicker than by a strict economy, her shattered finances.

She was a haughty, selfish, self-centred woman who soon made for herself numerous enemies,

thanks to the offhand manner with which she treated all those with whom she found herself thrown in contact. She never applied herself to the task of teaching her young mistress the difficult lesson of trying to make herself popular, but on the contrary tried to inspire within her the same prejudices in regard to the people she disliked that she herself entertained. She was about the worst adviser a newly married Sovereign could have had, and one can only wonder why this fact was not recognised earlier than it was; for it ultimately became a question as to who was the more disliked, the Empress or her Mistress of the Robes.

The Princess Galitzyne, nevertheless, soon became a power at Court. She contrived to obtain large grants of money which the successive ministers of finance who took over the succession of Count Witte, were but too happy to arrange for her, in return for her protection. She was greedy and avaricious, cruel and cold hearted, and utterly devoid of scruples. In the Palace she was heartily disliked, yet no one dared to say a word against her, because it was well known that eventually she could become a terrible enemy of those of whom she thought she had reason to complain.

The Princess died a year or two before the great war, and for some time her place remained empty, until at last it was offered to Madame Narischkine, an intimate friend of the Empress Dowager, and one of the most respected women in St. Petersburg society.

Madame Narischkine was quite a different woman from her predecessor. She was kind, polite, amiable, and highly principled, as well as conscientious. She would never have hurt a fly, and she had always applied herself to smooth the path in life of all the people in whom she had happened to be interested.

Unfortunately she was not sympathetic with the Empress Alexandra, and the latter could never bring herself to treat her with the same familiarity as she had done the Princess Galitzyne. Then Madame Narischkine objected to Rasputin, and of course this was sufficient to prevent her being a persona grata. The Grand Duchess Elizabeth also did not care for her; perhaps because she felt that the new Mistress of the Robes had never quite approved of her. Madame Narischkine was a very discreet woman, but at the same time she could very well convey to persons whom she did not think fit

to be upon terms of intimacy with her what she thought of them. The Empress never took to her, which was a great pity, and sometimes treated her with great rudeness and with an astonishing lack of consideration. But in spite of these difficulties with which her path was beset, Madame Narischkine behaved magnificently when the hour of danger sounded. When the Revolution broke out, she immediately repaired to Czarskoi Selo and never left the Empress through those days of sorrow and anxiety which saw the latter taken prisoner in her own palace. She volunteered, in spite of her advanced age (she is over seventy) to accompany her mistress into exile, but the request was declined by the provisional government, and Madame Narischkine had perforce to submit, but she was the last one to bid good-bye to the Empress and to the young Grand Duchesses before they entered the train which was to carry them away to the solitudes of Siberia. It is likely that if Madame Narischkine had, from the outset, been with the Czarina, many of the mistakes committed by the latter would have been avoided. As it was she followed the advice given her by the Princess Galitzyne, and this was never wise advice, because the Princess, who

was a born flatterer, was most careful never to say to Alexandra Feodorovna anything which she knew or feared might displease her. Under her guidance the unfortunate Empress had not a chance to succeed in winning the affections of her subjects. Besides the Princess, there were four maids of honour attached to the person of the young Czarina. The first was the Countess Lamsdorff, with whom the Sovereign could not get on and to whom she took a violent dislike. Then came the Princess Bariatinsky, who also resigned her functions with a certain amount of "fracas," and who made no mystery of the fact that she could not stand the lack of consideration with which she was being treated. A Caucasian lady, the Princess Orbeliani, took her place, and succeeded in retaining her difficult position until her death. Then there was a Princess Obolensky, who had much unpleasantness to bear, but who accepted everything with wonderful patience, thanks, it was said, to her attachment to the young Grand Duchesses, the daughters of Nicholas II. She is still with the Imperial family, and has accompanied them to Tobolsk, in spite of the opposition of her family, who would have liked her to leave the Empress. There was also

another personage in the household who held there quite a privileged situation; this was Mademoiselle Schneider, whose duties consisted in reading to the Czarina, and who was the only attendant she had brought over with her from Darmstadt. Mademoiselle Schneider could enter the apartments of her mistress whenever she liked. She was the medium through whom Alexandra Feodorovna communicated with her relatives in Germany, to whom she always felt afraid to write by post, and she was also the one and only person with whom the Empress spoke German. We all liked her, because she was a quiet, unassuming person; but I shall not take it upon myself to say whether or not she gave to the German government information it would have been better to have withheld. Then again there was a private secretary, whose business it was to attend to the correspondence of the Empress, and who used to make reports to her every morning. The post was first filled by Count Lamsdorff, then by Count Rostavtsoff, and neither of these gentlemen was quite up to the task. They did not know how to interest the Czarina in their work, which they accomplished in a methodical manner devoid of any initiative. Among their duties was

the administration of Alexandra's private purse and the control of her charities until the time when she assumed it herself at the period of the Japanese war. It was part of the privileges of the private secretary to pay out the bills of the Empress or at least to give out their amount to the head maid, that is, to myself. Count Lamsdorff paid whatever I asked, without the slightest demur, but his successor used to ask for explanations, and to make his comments, which sometimes was most annoying. The private accounts of the Czarina were settled on the 22nd day of every month, when the expenses of the thirty preceding days had to be balanced and adjusted. She was most particular about this, and hated being in debt to any one. But at the same time she absolutely ignored the meaning of the word economy, bought and ordered whatever she liked without a thought as to how her expenses were to be met, and more than once I have had to appeal, unknown to her, to the Czar, and to ask him to give orders to settle his wife's bills without her being worried about the matter.

Every spring and autumn the coming fashions were brought to the Empress, so that she might make her choice. She usually had about fifty

dresses for each season, as I have had already occasion to explain, but whenever any unlooked for event occurred she would order special gowns to meet it. Her hats were generally made by Bertrand, a French firm in St. Petersburg; she ordered about twenty-five or thirty for the summer season and several fur toques for the winter. She liked white hats, which she often wore, and for a long time remained faithful to the small bonnets affected by Queen Alexandra of England in her youth. Later on she took to large hats, which were generally trimmed profusely with ostrich feathers. About these feathers the Empress was most fussy. The St. Petersburg climate is so very damp that it is almost next to impossible to keep feathers curled in summer, especially in Peterhof, on the Baltic shore, where the Court, as a rule, spent July and August. We had, therefore, to have the trimmings of the Empress's hats seen to every day, and messengers used to go daily to St. Petersburg to carry to Madame Bertrand the different millinery as well as the feather boas of Alexandra Feodorovna to be freshened and rearranged.

As a rule, the Czarina used to spend something like ten thousand roubles a month on her toilet, and

sometimes even more than that. She was extravagant,—there is no doubt about it,—but then she was the Empress of Russia, and considered it part of her duties to appear magnificently attired. The Emperor, too, liked to see her well dressed, and especially richly dressed. The latter was easy, but the former more difficult, because of the peculiar ideas of my Imperial mistress in regard to her clothes.

When her household was organised she was given eight maids to attend upon her, of whom there were to be always two on duty during the day, and two during the night, when they had to sit in a room in the near vicinity of the Imperial bedchamber, ready to be called in case of emergency. In the usual order of things they would have had to dress the Czarina's hair morning and evening, but the latter hated to have different hands perform this task, so she arranged to have a hairdresser come each day to arrange her coiffure, which was never very elaborate except upon official occasions, when a diadem had to be fixed in her hair. I was always present when she dressed and undressed. It was part of my business to see that everything connected with her toilet was in order and that nothing

she required was missing. She never twice wore the same pair of gloves, but liked old shoes and slippers. As for her stockings they were of the finest silk, and manufactured specially for her by the firm of Swears and Wells in London.

This system of having eight maids was continued for about ten years or so, then one of them died, and another one asked to be relieved from her duties, and they were never replaced. The Czarina thought that it was quite sufficient for her to have six attendants, and she abolished the night waiting, which had always been so irksome to the people concerned in it. She used to dismiss her maids at eleven o'clock and then retire to her bedroom, where she read or worked alone, but did not require any more attendance, except in case she felt ill or one of her children was indisposed. She was exacting, but never unjust or cruel, and she hated to be the cause of inconvenience to other people. At first she had never dared to alter anything in the customs of the Russian Court, but later on she asserted herself and made many changes in the interior arrangements of the Palace, all of which were practical and tended to the amelioration of the condition of her numerous servants, who nevertheless

did not show themselves grateful to her for her anxiety about their welfare, and who in the hour of her misfortune mostly abandoned her, or turned with alacrity against her.

CHAPTER X

THE CZARINA AND ST. PETERSBURG SOCIETY

At the time of her marriage St. Petersburg society was well disposed toward my unfortunate mistress, and it would have been easy for her to have made herself popular. Unfortunately she had, as I have said, a sarcastic tongue, and made no secret of her likes and dislikes; nor did she hesitate to ridicule certain customs to which old and important dowagers clung with persistency. She always feared to be thought too familiar, owing to the fact that the Imperial family, from the very first day of her arrival in Russia, had drilled into her ears the caution that St. Petersburg was not Darmstadt, and that the free and easy manners of a little German town would be out of place at the Court of the mighty Czar of All the Russias. She had therefore fallen into the other extreme, and disciplined herself to be as stiff as possible. The Empress Marie had been in the habit of receiving

in her own private boudoir the ladies who craved an audience from her, and of asking them to sit beside her. Her daughter-in-law made it a point to give her audience standing, and to converse for a few minutes without ever offering a chair to the old women who had applied for the honour of an introduction to her. She coldly extended to them her hand to kiss, which further incensed them, and her natural shyness, added to this stiff reception, of course made her many enemies. She began to be criticised, and that in no friendly spirit. Unfortunately she became aware of this, and it set her from the very first against the people she ought to have tried to make her friends. Then gossip, and that mostly ill natured, too, did its work, and all kinds of anecdotes were put into circulation concerning the want of kindness of the young Empress. She was accused of being sarcastic and of making fun of old people whom age and past service ought to have preserved from the ridicule she was supposed to shower upon them. Then, again, the Czarina had the imprudence to express in public her disgust at what she called the loose manners of St. Petersburg society. She tried to become acquainted with all the gossip going about town, and declared that

she was going to reform the morals of her empire, proceeding by striking off the list of invitations for a Court ball the names of all the women supposed rightly or wrongly to have had a flirtation of some kind. The result was that hardly any ladies appeared at this particular ball, with the exception of mothers with girls to bring out, and the whole of St. Petersburg rose up in arms against its Empress. It was decided to boycott her, which was done, and the Empress Mother was asked to interfere and to explain to her daughter-in-law that it was not her business to brand with any kind of stigma the names of ladies in regard to whom no open scandal had ever taken place. The incident assumed such proportions that the Czar was asked to interfere, and he decided that in future the list of invitations for Court festivities was to be submitted to his mother and not to his wife, who was still too great a stranger in Russia to know who ought or ought not to be invited to the Winter Palace.

As may be imagined, the little incident I have just narrated did not tend to improve the relations between the young Czarina and the Dowager, and the former's popularity suffered from it to a con-

siderable extent. On the New Year following upon this memorable tempest in a tea-cup, St. Petersburg ladies made up their minds not to put in an appearance at the great reception which followed upon divine service in the Winter Palace, a reception during which Court society offered its New Year's wishes to the sovereigns. So about four of them, who by virtue of the official position of their husbands could not absent themselves, were the only ones who attended the function. This absence, *en masse,* could not but be noticed, and of course the Czarina was offended. But she was powerless to retort otherwise than passively, which she did by avoiding in the future showing herself in public, also by discontinuing her audiences and even the ball which had been considered as an indispensable feature of every winter season in the Russian capital. This manner of manifesting her displeasure only added to the bitterness of the feelings which she had inspired, as was to be expected, and soon fashionable ladies deserted St. Petersburg for the Riviera or Paris, where they felt happier and more at their ease than in their own country. One after another the big houses, which used to rival the Court itself by the splendour of their entertain-

ments, closed their doors, and the "Palmyra of the North," as the capital of the Czars used to be called, became one of the dullest cities in the whole world.

There were people who attempted to remonstrate with my mistress for this retirement in which she persisted in living. She was told that it would be relatively easy for her to regain some of her lost popularity if she would only allow people to eat, drink, and be merry in her presence. Alexander III., too, had hated society, and preferred his beloved Gatschina to all his other residences, but he had fulfilled the social duties he was expected to fulfill, and during his reign there had not existed in the whole of Europe a more brilliant Court than that of Russia. His daughter-in-law was advised to follow his example in this respect. But she would not do so.

I remember that one day whilst we were discussing the question of what kind of new clothes she would want for the coming winter, I remarked that she ought to order more evening dresses than she had done. The Empress interrupted me with the remark that she did not mean to have any more, because there would be no necessity for her to have

them. I then observed that it would be a great disappointment to the many young girls about to make their appearance in society for the first time if no Court balls were given. Alexandra Feodorovna got quite angry, and, getting up with impatience, exclaimed, "I cannot understand why it is expected of me to amuse all the silly children their parents are bringing out."

Happily for her no one was present when she gave way to this fit of temper, but one may imagine how it would have been commented upon by any of her numerous enemies had they chanced to overhear it. This state of antagonism (for it can hardly be called by any other name) which existed between Alexandra Feodorovna and the smart set of her capital was not extended to other places. In the Crimea she liked to have people about her, as I have already related, and she even gave dances for her daughters. But though the Grand Duchess Olga had attained her eighteenth year during the winter which preceded the outbreak of the great war, her mother did not attempt to invite any one to the Palace of Czarskoi Selo to amuse her. The Empress Dowager had to arrange some entertainments in her own Anitschkoff

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GROUNDS OF THE IMPERIAL PALACE AT TZARSKOIÉ SÉLO

Palace for her granddaughter's benefit, but each time they were invited to attend them there was an explosion of grief on the part of their mother which completely spoilt their pleasure. The Czarina had a morbid fear of the sharp tongues of the ladies of the capital, and she was always expecting that her daughters would be subjected to the same kind of criticism which had been applied so liberally to her own self. This she wished to guard them against. The idea was a mistaken one, because everybody admired and liked the graceful girls, who had always an amiable word for those they met, and who seemed so happy and so delighted whenever they had an opportunity of enjoying themselves like all other girls of their age.

The only person who at one time was in possession of the confidence of the Czarina to a limited degree, the Grand Duchess Anastasia, wife of the Grand Duke Nicholas, tried, without success, to get her to look upon people with more indulgence, and not in such a morbid way. My mistress would not hear reason, and at last declared that it was useless to be an Empress of Russia if one could not do what one liked, and that all she craved was the

privilege to be left alone and allowed to enjoy, unrestrained, her taste for solitude.

In that respect the Empress was certainly not quite normal, and at times she most undoubtedly suffered from what is called the mania of persecution. People abroad have attributed this abnormal condition of hers to the dread of revolution, the spectre of which was supposed to haunt her constantly. This, however, was not at all the case, because long before any one had an idea that revolution might break out, my mistress was already affected by that strange fear of seeing strangers approach her. The fact is that she had become morbid, thanks to the latent dislike which she knew but too well was felt in regard to her, and which worried her to the extent that she felt disgusted with the world in general and had come to the conclusion that it was not worth while to try to conciliate it, but that the best thing to do was to avoid seeing too much of it.

People have spoken at length of her tastes for occultism and spiritism, and said that she looked for consolation for imaginary woes to the practices of turning tables and other rubbish of the same kind. Unfortunately this was true to a certain extent, be-

cause it is a sad fact that the Empress liked to sit at tables for hours in the hope that they would begin turning, and she firmly believed that people could come back from the other world and manifest themselves to their friends. But what is not so generally known is that it was the Grand Duke Nicholas, the future generalissimo of the Russian armies, who first set her to do so. He it was who brought to the Palace of Czarskoi Selo a man called Philippe, who professed to be a powerful medium, and who certainly inspired the Czarina with great confidence. For a year or two he remained in favour, then was dismissed quite suddenly because he had been found out by accident, but so completely that even Alexandra Feodorovna could not defend him.

Some people have said that it was not without malicious intention that the Grand Duke Nicholas introduced this dangerous person to Czarskoi Selo. It has been reported that he wanted to bring about a scandal to the effect that the Empress should be declared, if not quite insane, at least afflicted with melancholia, and put under restraint. She was already at that time suspected of German leanings and sympathies, and supposed to influence her hus-

band in favour of Germany and a German alliance. The Grand Duke Nicholas was a strong partisan of a close union with France, and of course he considered that my poor mistress was an obstacle to his views, so he would have been delighted had any circumstance arisen which would have put her aside. Certainly he was the means through which the Empress acquired her strange tastes for all things connected with occultism, and he was also the first person to draw the attention of the public and of the Imperial family to this peculiarity, and to insist on the dangers which it presented. The fact was that the Czarina was the only obstacle which the Grand Dukes and their party encountered in the realisation of their plans to take under their protection and to keep in their power the weak-minded Nicholas II., who, it was known but too well, always adopted the opinion of the last person who spoke with him, and was incapable of making any decision of his own accord. The Empress, thanks to the fact that she was always with him, had the best chance to make herself heard and listened to, and consequently she represented a formidable danger to the ambitions of those haughty Romanoffs who aspired, if not to dethrone, at least

to keep in their own hands this feeble nephew, so devoid of initiative.

During the last two or three years which preceded the war, these different intrigues had assumed quite a dangerous character, and when the Rasputin incident occurred, they only grew in intensity. The Empress became the one great enemy, to the destruction of whom many applied themselves with the more energy that she began to do what she had carefully avoided before—to interest herself in politics, and to study them carefully, in view to being able to advise her husband amidst the growing difficulties of the international political position in general. The Grand Duke Nicholas, who headed the faction having for aim the removal of Alexandra Feodorovna, spared no means to destroy her influence, and to ruin her reputation as a Sovereign and as a woman. He partly succeeded, as we have seen, but at the same time he contributed to the fall of his own dynasty, and to the ruin of his country. It is a sad but certain fact that the Russian Imperial family never understood the meaning of the word "solidarity," and perhaps it is thanks to this defect of theirs that the head of

the House of Romanoff has been sent into exile and his race deprived of the throne which Peter the Great and Catherine II. had so gloriously occupied.

CHAPTER XI

THE CZARINA AND HER MOTHER-IN-LAW

I HAVE heard that many different tales have been circulated concerning the relations of my mistress with the Dowager Empress. It is useless to pretend that they were pleasant, but, on the other hand, neither of the two ladies gave vent to open manifestations of hostility, whatever they may have thought in the interior of their hearts. During the first months following the marriage of the Czar things went smoothly, because it was impossible to show more deference to any one than Alexandra Feodorovna displayed in regard to her mother-in-law. But the latter was still too young to care to be suddenly called upon to play second fiddle, and she missed the power which she had exercised over Alexander III., who used to consult her in regard to everything he did. She had had enormous influence over him, and, if the truth be told, over the whole course of affairs in Russia, but she had ex-

ercised it with such tact, and so secretly, that it had never been suspected; on the contrary, the Empress had been described as a frivolous woman who cared only for dress, dances and parties. In regard to the Consort of Nicholas II. things were very different. She arrived in Russia with the reputation of being a clever woman, with strong opinions, and of course found the public prepared either to accept them or else to start up opposition against her. German princesses were not liked, and it had been hoped that the heir to the throne would avoid choosing a wife in a German court. The Dowager Empress was Danish by birth, a fact that had contributed most certainly to the great popularity she had immediately acquired. There was a powerful party behind her, quite ready to back her up against her daughter-in-law, and, unfortunately, the latter was apprised of it, which had the effect of setting her against any advice she received from quarters which she suspected of intriguing against her. As I have said before, if the Emperor and his young bride had been able from the beginning to set up an establishment of their own, perhaps things would not have fared so badly, and I have often wondered why this was not done. With the immense

Winter Palace standing empty, or almost so, it would not have been difficult to arrange some apartments for the newly married pair, until those they were to occupy definitely had been got ready. There were the rooms which had been occupied by the Empress Marie Alexandrovna, which, with small expense, might have been made habitable in a few days. They at least would have made a fitting establishment for a Sovereign, whilst the two small closets (for they can hardly be called anything else) which were assigned to Nicholas II. and his wife in the ground floor of the Anitschkoff Palace, were so inappropriate, so ugly and so uncomfortable that it is no wonder the latter felt depressed the whole time she was compelled to occupy them. Then, as I have said, the servants gossiped, and repeated to the Dowager Empress everything that her daughter-in-law was doing, a fact of which the latter became aware through remarks made to her by the elder lady, and the result was most disastrous. The arrival of the children, whose advent obliged Alexandra Feodorovna to set up a nursery, which she tried to model after those she had seen in England, did not improve conditions that already had become strained, because, as one daughter after another ap-

peared, Marie Feodorovna grew to think that her daughter-in-law would never give an heir to the throne and to look up towards her second son Michael as the future Emperor. This was gall and wormwood to my mistress, who often lamented the fact, and, when she had taken me into her confidence, complained of the want of consideration with which her mother-in-law made her feel that she was a nobody and had not fulfilled the duty which was expected of her, that of providing future Emperors for Russia. Other reasons also contrived to add to this state of latent irritation which had established itself in the bosom of the Imperial family. There was the question of the crown jewels; of the order in which the names of the two Empresses were to be introduced into the church liturgy; and many others, small and great. The Dowager was far too tactful to complain about the domestic relations of her son, but she contrived to let people guess her sentiments on the subject, and took to spending more and more of her time in Denmark, which after all was perhaps the best thing she could have done.

The Japanese war, however, brought her back to Russia, and it was during its course that there

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GRAND DUKE MICHAEL

happened the one great event in the life of Alexandra Feodorovna—the birth of her only son.

Great were the rejoicings when this small boy made his appearance in a world which was not to prove too kind to him, as we all know. His advent, however, disturbed the equanimity of several people, whilst it raised the hopes of others. For one thing, the Grand Duke Michael, the only brother of the Czar, lost all the importance with which he had been endowed in the eyes of the public as the eventual heir to the Russian throne. It also took away some of that of his mother, who was supposed to exercise considerable control over him, and of course the feelings of the latter on the subject were very much mixed, because though on the one hand she could not but rejoice at seeing the succession secured in the direct line, yet, on the other hand, she had accustomed herself, as had many others, to the idea that her eldest son would never become father to a boy, and it required a certain time before she could get accustomed to the changes which the birth of the little Alexis had brought about.

Furthermore, the young Empress, feeling at last secure of her own position, began to assert herself

far more than she had ever done before, and she tried to win for herself partisans. Unfortunately she looked for them among people who turned out afterwards to be her worst foes, and the liberty which she imagined she had acquired to live her own life without any regard to the trammels of etiquette or other consideration, transformed the dislike she had hitherto inspired into something very much akin to hatred.

Her boy proved a delicate child, and when the fact became known it awakened the hopes of the party antagonistic to Alexandra and raised those of the people attached to the fortunes of the Grand Duke Michael. His sister-in-law, when she found this out (and there were but too many people eager to inform her of it), grew in her turn to dislike the Grand Duke, and to think how she could get rid of him. According to the family statute of the Romanoffs, he would have been Regent of the Empire in case the Czar had died before his heir had reached his majority, and the Empress, in that case, would have been more or less subjected to him and to any commands he would have deemed it necessary to issue to her. Most likely the first thing he would have done would have been to de-

prive her of the custody of her son and to surround the latter with men of his own choice. The very thought of such a contingency made Alexandra Feodorovna wild, so when the Grand Duke contracted the morganatic marriage which brought upon him the wrath of his brother she seized upon the occasion to try to get rid once and forever of a personage whom she considered her worst enemy.

If the truth be told, poor Michael had never been her enemy, however much he may have disapproved of some of her actions. The only thing he asked was to be left alone with the wife whom he had chosen and married against the opposition of the whole world and of his entire family, beginning with his mother. She was a lady by birth, the wife of one of his brother officers in a Cuirassier regiment quartered at Gatchina. The Grand Duke had become attracted by her principally on account of her sympathetic appearance and the patience with which she had listened to the tale of his affection for one of his sister Olga's maids of honour with whom he had been passionately in love and whom he had wished to marry. The romance was quickly nipped in the bud by the interference of the Dowager Empress and the young lady packed

away abroad with strict injunctions not to return to Russia until further notice. The Grand Duke had been very unhappy, but had submitted, and poured the story of his wrongs into the ears of Madame Wulfert. The latter was a charming woman, but she had had a first husband, from whom she had been divorced before marrying her present one. This alone would have made her undesirable as a wife for the only brother of the Czar, and when her union with Captain Wulfert was also dissolved, thanks to the relations which had established themselves between her and the young Grand Duke, this undesirableness was still further accentuated. But she had given birth to a son, and was moreover a person of considerable attraction and of unusual cleverness. Michael found out that he could not live without her, and married her in Vienna, without asking any one's permission to do so, thereby bringing upon his head the wrath of all his relatives.

The Emperor, however, would have felt inclined to let the whole matter pass, or at least to make as if he ignored it. But neither his mother nor his wife would hear of it. The former wished some kind of punishment to be inflicted on her rebellious

son, and the latter decided that this punishment should be a most rigorous one. She prevailed upon the weak-minded Czar to put his brother under restraint and to make him what is called in England a ward in chancery, assuming himself his guardianship and depriving him of the management of the large fortune he had inherited from the Czar Alexander III. This made him of course ineligible as a Regent should the Emperor die, and that was what the Czarina was aiming at. Of course she was wrong, and respectful as I was towards her, I could not help one evening, when she had broached the subject of her own accord, telling her that I thought she had made a great mistake in taking such a decided part in the chastisement of her brother-in-law, and that it would have been more politic on her part to keep outside the matter and to allow it to be settled between the Czar and the Dowager Empress, who, after all, were the only persons concerned in it. My mistress listened in silence to my words, then suddenly exclaimed with unusual violence: "I had to do it; I had to do it; he wanted to part me from my son; he had to be put out of the way!" There was nothing to reply to this outburst, but I could not help regretting

that the Empress had allowed herself to be influenced by false reports, and that her common sense had not prevailed and stopped her from compromising herself so openly in this matter. My forebodings, alas, turned out to have been true ones, because the first person who was furious with the Czarina for the part she had played in this whole story was the Empress Dowager, who had not wished things to go so far, and who guessed at once the real reasons which had actuated her daughter-in-law. The breach between the two ladies was in consequence considerably widened, and as my mistress grew more and more addicted to those superstitious practices which proved her bane, Marie Feodorovna found real grounds for criticising her, so that it became at last a recognised fact that the worst adversary of the Empress was her own mother-in-law.

I am sure that the latter would have felt sorry had she known to what extent the strained relations which existed between her and her son's wife were talked of in public. She possessed far more sense of dignity than Alexandra Feodorovna, and had moreover been reared in old Imperial traditions unknown to her daughter-in-law. But she did not

like her, and on the other hand this sense of dignity to which I have just alluded suffered in seeing the domestic life of her child, a child who was also her Sovereign, turned into ridicule by everybody, and causing him to be despised even more than disliked. Finding that the war did not allow her to go to her beloved Denmark, she finally retired to Kieff, where the Revolution found her, and whence she went to Livadia in the Crimea, where she still is to-day. When I think over these things, it seems to me that all these frictions, which turned out ultimately to have been far more important than they appeared at first, might have been avoided, at least in part, if the young Empress had restrained herself in the expression of her feelings. But she was too frank, too honest, too true, to be able to play a comedy, and diplomacy was an art utterly unknown to her. She had not been trained in dissimulation, and she despised this atmosphere of the Court where a curb on one's thoughts and words was indispensable. In certain respects she was a child, with all a child's impulsiveness and beautiful indifference to the judgments and appreciations of the world, and this innocence of her mind and heart made her no match against the in-

trigues that surrounded her. She had no one to love her except her children, and a husband who was not strong enough to protect her against attack, and whom in the bottom of her heart she must have secretly despised, as indeed he deserved to be, because, whilst an amiable and kind man, he was not suited for a Sovereign, and could no more control his own conduct than he could the destiny of the nation over which fate had set him to rule. He had absolutely no initiative and no strength of character. No efforts of his parents or of his tutors in his young days had been able to change his natural indolence and readiness to accept and to endorse as his own the ideas and opinions of every one he talked to, even if they differed diametrically from those he had himself expressed previously.

CHAPTER XII

THE CZARINA'S DAILY OCCUPATIONS

I HAVE often been asked what the Czarina used to do with her days and whether it was true that she spent them in absolute idleness. And just as often I have wondered what could have given rise to such an opinion. The Empress was, on the contrary, one of those industrious women whose hands are never at rest, and who require to be always occupied in some way or another, either mentally or with some manual work which keeps their attention concentrated on its intricacies. At Darmstadt the Princesses were trained to make their own clothes and to wait upon themselves, and one of the great pleasures of my mistress was to embroider, cut, and make the different objects composing the layette and the wardrobe of her children. As I have already related, she had tried to arrange in Czarskoi Selo a Needlework Guild, but she did not meet with any enthusiastic response to her efforts in that direction. Nevertheless, until she left

it, there was in the Palace where she had made her home a room set apart for the use of the ladies who used to come and work on certain days and hours on clothes for the poor which were distributed to the indigent of Czarskoi Selo and St. Petersburg at Christmas time. When the Japanese war occurred, a regular working room was established in the Winter Palace and never closed, because it became the centre of the Empress's activity in the way of making garments for the poor. No Sovereign had ever thought of anything of the kind in Russia, and of course the action of Alexandra Feodorovna in that respect was discussed far and wide, and whilst many people applauded her for the initiative she had taken, others thought it was not dignified for a Russian Empress to cut flannels and knit stockings, even for the poor. They would have liked her to depend for her charities on other people, as her predecessors had done. In fact, in this as in so many other things, she was ignoring the traditions which governed all that went on in the Palaces of the Czars, and of course this was resented. But the poor population of the capital learnt to bless the Empress's name, and for a time was grateful to her, until the days of the first Revo-

lution, when everything that was connected with her became tinged with that unpopularity which had become attached to her name.

The Empress was a great reader, but only of serious books, and scientific ones were her favourites. She did not care for history, which she frankly owned bored her, because she could not interest herself in the sayings and doings of people long dead. But science held her enthralled, and every work which was published in English, French and German on astronomy, mathematics, and natural history was perused by her with avidity. She admired immensely Darwin's "Origin of Species," and had one day a furious battle with her Father Confessor, who remonstrated with her for keeping such a dangerous work in her rooms. Astronomy was also one of her hobbies, and she expounded it to her children whenever she found an occasion or opportunity to do so.

She embroidered wonderfully, and made some church ornaments which would easily have won a prize at any exhibition. But her great amusement was the drawing of caricatures which she executed with an incredible talent, having the knack of seizing the funny side of each thing or person

she tried her pencil upon. This talent, however, caused her much annoyance, because the people whose ridiculous points she seized upon became aware of it and were deeply offended, as a matter of course, especially the members of the Imperial family, who, more than any others, had the misfortune to fall under her satirical pencil. Had she been prudent enough not to show her sketches to friends it would not have been so bad, but she was, on the contrary, fond of exhibiting them, and did so without the least discrimination, with the result that she gained for herself the reputation of being an unkind and malicious woman, which was far from the case. The Empress tried to develop a love for music in her children, and greatly succeeded with her eldest daughter, the Grand Duchess Olga, who had a really wonderful talent for the piano. She could compose wild, melodious airs, imbued with that Russian and Slav sadness which is latent in all Northern characters. I remember one day last May when, entering unexpectedly the apartment where the young Grand Duchesses were sitting, I was entranced by the playing of Olga, who seemed to put into her music all the agony and anxiety of her soul. Things were

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GRAND DUCHESS OLGA

dark then. The possibility of seeing exchanged the prison of Czarskoi Selo for another was already looming on the horizon, and the young and blooming girl who was to be sent to the horrors and solitude of a terrible exile was giving vent to her feelings in the weird accents which she gave to the music with which she tried to ease her troubled feelings.

In spite of her taste for music, the Empress rarely went to the Opera. She hated showing herself in the big box where etiquette compelled her to sit, and she disliked the one that was common to all the members of the Imperial family. So that even during the early years of her marriage, when she used to spend a few weeks each winter in St. Petersburg, she rarely showed herself in any theatre, not even at the French play, which it had been almost a matter of obligation, from times immemorial, for the sovereigns to visit every Saturday.

She had made it a point to study the Russian language, but had never really learned to speak it, and had never divested herself of a very strong German accent that had a harsh sound, which added to its general unpleasantness. The Empress had not a pleasant nor a harmonious voice, and as she was aware of the fact she tried to overcome this

disadvantage by talking in very low tones, so low indeed that sometimes it was difficult to hear her. She would then get impatient and break off the conversation, to the dismay of her interlocutors. During the last years she had grown slightly deaf, which added to the difficulty.

Her inability to talk Russian naturally displeased people, but I have always wondered why she was so sharply taken to account for it, considering the fact that her mother-in-law had never learnt it either, which had not prevented her from becoming popular. It was again a case of "give a dog a bad name and hang him."

The Empress kept up a vast correspondence with her relatives all over Europe. In England, where she had been brought up, she had also friends with whom she liked to exchange her impressions and thoughts, and to her brother she wrote daily. She had a very distinct handwriting, plain and legible, and her signature was exceptionally large. Except in official documents she always used the name "Alix," instead of Alexandra, and the Emperor in the privacy of their family life called her "Alice." She generally occupied herself with her correspondence in the afternoon after her daily

walk with the Emperor, and as soon as her cup of tea was brought to her at five o'clock she stopped writing, even if she was in the midst of a letter. In that respect she was quite extraordinary. Things had to be done at a certain hour, and if not, had to be put off until the next day. She would not for anything in the world have sacrificed five minutes of the time appointed for something else to finish what she was doing at the moment.

In Czarskoi Selo she had a lovely room full of flowers where she had her writing table, a wonderful specimen of French art of the time of Louis XV. Next to it stood a smaller table, where she used to throw the sheets she had just finished writing upon, until all her letters were finished, when she would pick them up and put them in their envelopes. This led her sometimes to mix up one letter with another, and brought her into trouble through people getting missives which were not meant for them. While Queen Victoria was alive the Empress wrote to her regularly every week, but she did not much care for so doing, and used to say that it was a duty she would rather not have had imposed upon her. At Christmas and the New Year, she regularly sent her best wishes to the

other European sovereigns whom she knew personally.

In this room I have just described, which was hung up with light and bright chintz, reminding one of an English room, and which contained comfortable and at the same time costly furniture, the Empress transacted only her private correspondence. All her official writing was done in a small library opening out of her sitting room, where stood a large, ugly and practical writing table with innumerable pigeonholes, at which she used to sit when her private secretary presented to her his daily reports. It was at this table she made up her accounts and attended to all her business, and it was also here that she made out the programme for her public work, receptions, visits to charitable institutions, and so forth. She was most orderly and neat in her habits, and could tell at once where she had put such or such a paper. I do not think that she could have tolerated disorder in any shape or form around her, and she used to go through her numerous drawers and wardrobes every month, when she expected to find every single thing in the place where she had ordered it to be put. All her laces, of which she had a wonderful collection, were

kept in a separate cupboard, of which I was the only person to have a key. The Empress herself possessed a duplicate one, as she did of all her trunks, wardrobes, and cupboards, and she clung to them like a real German housewife, and sometimes would unexpectedly open one or the other of these receptacles to assure herself that they were kept in order. I remember an amusing instance of this mania. When the Empress married, she received among her wedding presents a beautiful writing table set in crystal and gold with her monogram and the Russian Eagle on the top of the inkstand. For some years she always used it, until at last one day the Emperor noticed that there was some inaccuracy in the coat of arms of the Romanoffs which was ornamenting the blotting book, and he instantly presented his wife with another and far handsomer writing table set, a masterpiece of the skill of Faberge, the great Court jeweller in St. Petersburg, which was made out of platinum and crystal, with big turquoises as ornaments. The pen was of solid gold and had a turquoise as a finish to the handle. Of course the Empress hastened to put away the old set which had displeased her spouse, and we stored it up in one of the cupboards

in which were kept the innumerable possessions of the Czarina. One day she opened the said cupboard when no one else was present and was highly displeased to find that some parts of this writing table set were put on a different shelf from the others. This had been done because we had thought that it would suit better the amount of room which we had at our disposal, but the Empress would not enter into considerations of that kind, and gave us a good scolding for keeping her things "in such disorder," as she expressed it.

Twice a year she went over her whole wardrobe, at the time when she ordered the new dresses which she required for each season. She then looked over the different articles in it with care, and either made a present of the things which she thought she would not want any longer, or sent them to her sister the Grand Duchess Elizabeth in Moscow, where the latter disposed of them among the poor girls of the Moscow nobility about to be married. She would be very careful to have every bit of real lace unpicked from these dresses, and then this lace was consigned to the cupboard set apart for that purpose, and entered in a catalogue, which was entirely written in the Empress's own hand.

As may be imagined, all this kept my mistress busy; and indeed there was hardly one hour in the day when she was not occupied with one thing or another. Her children's wardrobes were looked after by her with the same care that she applied to her own things. And at Czarskoi Selo and Livadia she herself used to look over the housekeeping books of the Imperial household, much to the dismay of the head of it, who often complained that the Empress did not in the least understand the intricacies of the management which she sometimes so freely criticised. But though she frankly owned that she did not know how much an egg or a potato cost, yet, as she declared, she liked to be aware of the price of the potatoes which she consumed. It was an innocent mania, and would have been considered as such if there had not existed malicious people ready to make fun of it, and to laugh at the "German Housekeeper," as they derisively called my poor mistress, who in view of this fact would have done much better not to have meddled in matters in which after all she had no need to enter, and which so many people would have been but too happy not to have to think about.

CHAPTER XIII

THE JAPANESE WAR AND THE BIRTH OF THE CZAREVITSCH

The first really great sorrow and anxiety which fell on my beloved mistress was the Japanese war. I am not writing here a political book, and indeed understand nothing about politics, but what I do know is that no one could have been more affected by the disasters which destroyed the Russian army and fleet than was the Empress. She used to spend hours weeping in her room, where she allowed no one, not even her children, to enter, and it was from that time that dated the terrible headaches which later on were to prostrate her so utterly. She was then in a delicate state of health, and the Emperor wanted to spare her as much as possible the news which was brought of one sad event after another concerning all that went on in this distant Manchuria, where Russian soldiers were fighting such a hard battle. The whole country was exasperated at the lamentable organisa-

tion, or rather want of organisation, which was revealed so unexpectedly, and it was dating from Mukden and Tsushima that the Revolutionary elements in the country raised their heads and began to threaten the throne which they were to destroy twelve years later. The whole of Russia was in the throes of an insurrectional movement, and perhaps the only persons who were not aware of its strength and magnitude were the sovereigns themselves. Nicholas II. had not realised the possibility of the fall of his dynasty and seriously believed that he could stop the torrent that was flooding the country. The Empress was ignorant of the details of the convulsions which were fast destroying the old legends and traditions which had presided at the government of the Empire for such a long time. She had a few illusions left still, and one of them was in regard to the strength and the spirit of devotion of the army. It was therefore a terrible shock to her to find that this army which she had believed to be invincible had allowed itself to be beaten by the troops of the Mikado whom she had regarded as savages. She felt cruelly the loss of prestige which this disastrous campaign entailed, and she also felt humiliated in her pride

as a Sovereign and as a woman. Added to this weight of anxieties was another—the dread that the child whose birth she was expecting would prove another daughter, whose advent into the world would add to the unpopularity of its mother. Sometimes my heart used to ache for her, when I saw her dragging herself through the park of Peterhof, looking so ill that one wondered whether she would be able to stand the trial which was awaiting her. In her cruel anxiety she found no one to encourage her or to whisper words of encouragement in her ear. Her husband was himself absorbed by the saddest of preoccupations and she did not care to add to them by speaking to him of her own personal griefs and sorrows. So the time went on, bringing every day new subjects for alarm, and new causes for discouragement. At last one morning I was called to the bedside of the Empress, together with all her other attendants, and with trembling hearts we awaited the verdict of the doctors as to her safety and the sex of the infant for whose advent we were watching with such intense interest. It was noon, and the great clock of the castle of Peterhof had just been heard striking the twelve strokes announcing it, when a

child's cry broke the silence of the room where the Empress was lying, and then Doctor Ott, her physician, turned towards the Czar, standing pale and worried beside his Consort, with the word: "I congratulate Your Majesty on the birth of a Czarevitsch."

Nicholas II. did not reply. He stood as if dazed by the unexpected news. No one spoke or interrupted his meditation, but all devoted themselves to the Empress, who was still under the effects of the chloroform that had been administered to her. When she opened her eyes she looked so weak that no one dared to tell her the good news, but she seemed to read it in the face of her husband, because she suddenly exclaimed: "Oh, it cannot be true; it cannot be true. Is it really a boy?"

Nicholas II. fell on his knees beside her and burst into tears, the first and only ones I had ever seen him shed.

The birth of an heir to the throne was an event of such magnitude that it absorbed for some time the whole attention of the public, and diverted it from all that was taking place in the Far East. For his parents it came as a consolation after long years of waiting, and seemed to have been destined

to comfort them for the disasters which were taking place at the front. The Czar could not restrain his joy, and at every moment he used to speak of "his son," and to look out for occasions to pronounce the magic words, "My Boy." The Empress's happiness was less buoyant but just as intense, perhaps even more so, for this opportune arrival of the little man whom one had already left off expecting improved considerably her own position, and gave her an importance which had been denied to her before. She became passionately attached to this child of promise, and almost painfully and morbidly devoted to him. Unfortunately he proved a most delicate little mortal, and for the first years that followed upon his birth the doctors who attended him hardly hoped they would be able to save his life. He was born with an organic disease, or rather defect, a weakness of the blood vessels which ruptured on the slightest provocation, causing hemorrhages that sometimes could not be stopped for hours. For a long time his condition was hidden from the public, but at last concealment became impossible, especially after an attack which occurred about two years before the great war, which was of so serious a nature that the

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THE EX-CZAREVITCH

child's life was absolutely despaired of. A few months before this he had been obliged to undergo an operation for hernia and had hardly recovered from the effects of it when an accident brought about the hemhorrhage which for weeks resisted every remedy employed to stop it. These were anxious times for the parents, and the Empress's hair changed colour and showed streaks of grey before her son was at last pronounced out of danger.

I have spoken at length of this serious illness of the little Alexis because so many ridiculous tales were put into circulation concerning it, tales which were as malicious as they were foundationless. The small heir of Nicholas II. was never the object of any attack of nihilists, and all the detailed circumstances which some newspapers related concerning him were all of them pure invention. It is sufficient to say that when he became ill the Imperial family were not on their yacht, but were staying at one of the Czar's shooting boxes at Spala in Poland. I have often wondered who could have had an interest in giving publicity to the ridiculous and distressing tale which is to this day firmly believed by many people outside of Russia.

When the Grand Duke was able to be moved his

parents returned to Czarskoi Selo, whence they went for many months to the Crimea, the mild climate of which was considered to be necessary for his convalescence. But for more than two years after this attack the boy was not allowed to walk, and was constantly carried about in the arms of a sailor from the Imperial yacht whom he had taken into his affection, and who to this day is with him, having chosen to accompany him to Siberia. This necessity of having to exhibit, so to say, a sick child, was most painful to the feelings of the Empress, whose maternal pride was hurt by the knowledge that the whole of Russia was commenting on it and pitying the Emperor for having an heir in such a sad state of health. She was also continually subjected to the railleries of her husband's family that reproached her for having, as one of the Grand Duchesses once expressed it, "contaminated the Romanoffs with the diseases of her own race." There was some truth in the accusation, because the illness from which the boy suffered was hereditary in the Saxe-Coburg family, and had been brought into the House of Hesse by the Princess Alice, the mother of the Empress, whose own brother, the Duke of Albany, had died from the

effects of it at Cannes. The worst thing about it was that one could never know when it was going to break out afresh. The slightest knock was sufficient to bring on an attack, and one can imagine how far from easy it was to watch over every movement of a lively boy full of fun and high spirited, such as Alexis proved to be. On the other hand this physical infirmity (for it could hardly be called anything else) had this result that the child got to be inordinately spoiled. The mother was afraid to contradict him or to refuse to submit to any of his caprices, because she had been told that it was dangerous for him even to cry, as any exertion of his lungs or throat might bring about the rupture of some blood vessel. One may therefore form an idea of the system of education to which Alexis was subjected, and perhaps one will feel indulgent in regard to the Empress when thinking of the perpetual dread and anxiety in which her days and nights were spent, and forgive her for the weakness which made her yield to every whim or caprice of the boy who seemed to have been born to add to her cup of sorrow, and not for the purpose of bringing joy into her life.

I will now relate an incident which deeply im-

pressed the Czarina at the time when it occurred. It was a few days before the birth of her son. We were at Peterhof and she was dressing for dinner. Suddenly we heard a crash behind us, and were dismayed to see that a heavy looking glass which hung upon the wall behind Alexandra Feodorovna had fallen to the floor, where it had been shattered into a thousand fragments. The Empress cried aloud in her emotion, and for one moment I believed that she was about to faint, so white did her features become. I applied myself to reassure her, but she would not be comforted, and declared that it was an ill omen and that probably she would die in childbirth. When everything was over, and on the day of the christening of the Grand Duke Alexis, I ventured to remind his mother of her fright of a few weeks before, and added that it was a clear proof how wrong it was to be superstitious, because certainly nothing happier could have occurred than the event which had just taken place, notwithstanding the bad omen of the broken looking glass. The Empress smiled sadly, and replied: "My good Marfa, we do not know yet what is going to befall my baby, and whether his will be a

happy life or not. Perhaps the bad omen was for him and not for me."

A curious thing is that exactly ten years later, in July, 1914, just before the war, we were again at Peterhof, and the Czarina was dressing for dinner in the same room, when that identical looking glass, which had been rehung, fell with the same noise and just as unexpectedly, terrifying her as it had done before. Alas, alas, we could afford then to laugh at omens, but now that so many tragic things have occurred I wonder sometimes whether these accidents (for one can hardly call them anything else) were a kind of warning of the calamities about to follow. Certainly they could not fail to impress a woman as superstitious as the Empress grew in time to be.

When I say "grew," it is not quite exact. She had always believed in good and bad omens, and she had brought with her from her German home a quantity of beliefs in all kinds of uncanny things. She would not have sat down thirteen at dinner for anything, and the sight of three candles on a table made her frantic. She would not have put on a green dress for fear it would bring her bad luck, and she was always careful to look at a new moon

from the right side. She never began anything on a Friday, and she was firmly convinced that one could, if only one were strong enough as a medium, summon people from another world into one's presence. She believed also in miracles, and would worship any dirty relic which hundreds of unwashed peasants had kissed, without feeling the least disgust, which was the more strange in that generally she was almost meticulously careful not to touch anything that had not been thoroughly cleansed. The influence which Rasputin grew to acquire over her mind proceeded only from this weakness of hers, which was continually fomented and encouraged by her sister, the Grand Duchess Elizabeth, herself a most devout person who combined bigotry with an utter unscrupulousness as to the means with which she could realise the many ambitions that she entertained.

If the Emperor had been a man of strong character he might have prevented his young wife from falling under the influence of the many people who merely used her as a pawn in their game. But in his way he was just as superstitious as she, and they both were so absorbed by their love and anxiety for their only son, that they clung to all those

whom they thought could be of use to him. Thus when they saw Rasputin, whom they considered to be a saint, prostrate himself on the ground and implore the Almighty to cure the boy, and when after this they noticed that the boy was getting stronger, they felt more and more tempted to think that it was not the doctors (who had told them that the child could never be permanently cured) who had made him better, but the will of the Almighty, and that it was to the Almighty alone they had to look for the conservation of the life of that much cherished son.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CZARINA, HER CHILDREN AND HER CHARITIES

It would be difficult to find a better mother than the Empress Alexandra. She entered into the smallest details of the training of her daughters and her son, and she tried before everything else to imbue them with the same serious points of view with which she looked upon life and its numerous duties. She insisted on her children always speaking the truth, and the only time I ever saw her really angry with the little Alexis was one morning when he was caught by her telling a falsehood. She had suffered so much through the insincerity which continually dogged her footsteps that she made up her mind to save her children from this misery, and she applied herself to make out of them sincere people. She had been very lucky in the choice of the lady who was appointed to superintend the education of the young Grand Duchesses. Mademoiselle Toutscheff was

a person of the highest moral character, who gave herself up to her duties of governess to the daughters of Nicholas II. with a complete devotion. People said that she had been the whole time in variance with the Empress, and that she had left at last because her advice had been disregarded. But this was not quite correct. It is true that she objected to the introduction of Rasputin to her pupils, but that was principally because she feared the influence which this illiterate peasant might come to exercise over the impressionable minds of the young girls entrusted to her care, whom she did not wish to see afflicted with the superstitious religious exaggerations to which their mother unfortunately succumbed. This led to friction between her and Alexandra Feodorovna, and she preferred to resign her functions rather than to remain at her post after having lost the confidence of the mother of her pupils. There may also have been another reason for her going. The Grand Duchess Olga was already twenty years of age, and she had developed an independent character which had made the position of Mademoiselle Toutscheff extremely difficult. She thought that it would be to the advantage of everybody if she severed her connection with

the Imperial family before she had spoilt it by unseemly quarrels.

In a certain sense she was right, because it was unfortunately an undoubted fact that the Empress had become quite fanatical in her allegiance to the Greek Orthodox Church, and that she tried to induce her daughters to follow her example. Happily for them the girls had a great deal of common sense, and they managed to keep themselves free from the religious excesses into which their mother had fallen. They loved her tenderly, and would have given their life for her, and she on her side doted on these girls. When they were babies she spent most of her spare time with them in their nursery or schoolroom, and later on she shared with them all her occupations and associated them with her life as much as she could. She never parted from them or from their brother, and there was not a thing which concerned their well-being, down to the smallest details, into which she did not enter. When the war broke out she with her two eldest daughters followed a course of training as sisters of charity, and in the hospital which she opened in Czarskoi Selo she nursed the wounded soldiers with them.

In regard to the little boy whose advent had been such a source of joy to his parents, the Empress was also full of solicitude. She had taken upon herself his religious training, and every morning had him brought to her room for an hour, when she would read to him the gospel and teach him the catechism. She was a fond, but by no means a foolish mother, and what she aspired after was to make out of her children honest men and women and worthy members of society. But at the same time she had very determined opinions in the matter of education, and there were things which she could not understand, as, for instance, the necessity for her girls to have some amusements in their lives. She imagined that it was quite enough for them to live with their parents, in possession of all that their hearts could desire in the matter of material satisfactions, and would not hear of the necessity of marriage for them. She could not bring herself to look upon them as upon grown-up women, and considered them always in the light of babies in need of her care. She is not the only mother who may be reproached for this failing, and she was more reproached for it than she deserved to be.

The little Grand Duke Alexis had a tutor, an

Englishman, whom he liked very much, and also a French master. His mother wanted him to have a complete command of foreign languages, knowing by experience how difficult it is for people placed in high positions to get on without it. The boy was a bright and intelligent child, and if he had only had good health, he might have made greater progress in his studies. But half of his time was spent in bed, and naturally this interfered with the course of his lessons. His sisters also were not in possession of the best of health, and this extreme delicacy of her children was a source of perpetual anxiety to the Czarina. She also objected to what she declared was a tendency towards frivolity on the part of her girls. Tatiana especially was extremely fond of nice clothes and of jewellery, and her mother was continually trying to subdue her extravagances in that direction, notwithstanding the fact that she very well knew the like reproach might be applied to her own self. She was continually drawing the attention of her daughters towards the sufferings of others, and her instructions bore fruit, because when the war broke out the Grand Duchesses displayed wonderful qualities of self-abnegation and devotion to the cause of suffering humanity. Ta-

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THE EX-CZARINA AND HER SON

tiana in particular was quite marvellous, and worked indefatigably in the relief committee at the head of which she stood, which proved the only one that did any good, and where malversations did not take place. She renounced any pleasures she might have obtained in the way of buying this or that thing that attracted her fancy, and at last when money became scarce she sold a beautiful pearl necklace which her father had given to her on her eighteenth birthday, to relieve some of the distress which was being constantly brought before her notice. The lessons of her mother had borne fruit.

The Czarina was naturally extremely charitable, and moreover she had very sane ideas in regard to the relief of suffering and misery. She had especially at heart the fate of small children, and the society which she and the Emperor founded, which was destined to encourage poor women in their aspirations after maternity by teaching them how to take care of their offspring, was an elaborate and most intelligent affair. She would certainly have brought it to an excellent result if the Revolution had not interfered and destroyed her plans in that respect, as it destroyed so many other things.

My mistress has been reproached at different

times for having shown herself indifferent to the cause of national education, and for not having considered that problem with the attention it deserved. But this was also an unreasonable reproach. The Empress could not, even if she had so wished, have interfered with the conduct of the different educational establishments for women in the Empire. These were all of them placed under the patronage of the Empress Dowager, who was far too jealous of her privileges in that respect to have consented to share them with her daughter-in-law. The same thing might have been said in regard to the work of the Red Cross, which was entirely controlled by Marie Feodorovna, who brought to it great knowledge and considerable ability. But at the same time she would not allow the young Czarina to interfere with it, and when the latter tried in her various visits to the Front to suggest this or that improvement in the management of the different hospitals she inspected, her mother-in-law instantly protested and declared herself affronted by what she considered to be a criticism on her management. The young Empress had to devote herself to the care of the wounded in the different hospitals which she had organised at Czarskoi Selo,

and her work remained confined to the great committee for relief of the refugees from the invaded countries and other victims of the war, which the Emperor had founded at the beginning of the campaign, and the care and patronage of which he had placed under the management of his wife. It was an interesting but at the same time a most disheartening work, because it was impossible to follow its execution, and one had perforce to depend on people more or less reliable. My mistress often regretted that she was debarred from putting her experience and her great love for her neighbour at the service of the army. This, however, was denied her, perhaps not without reason, because by that time she had already become most unpopular among the troops, who had taken to calling her "the German." One day when she was inspecting a field ambulance, she heard the expression in reference to herself and was so overcome by it that she could not restrain her tears. The poor woman, though she knew that she was regarded with anything but affection by her husband's subjects, yet had believed that the army at least appreciated her care and her desire for its welfare. The discovery that such was far from being the case was a great

blow to her. As time went on, carrying away with it all her hopes of winning the love of the Russian nation, she became hardened and ceased to conceal the contempt which she felt for a world that had failed to realise and to believe in her good intentions. But through it all she applied herself to hide from her children the intensity of her disillusions, and she went on instilling into them those high principles to which she had tried to remain faithful herself. Her great misfortune was that she lived in great times, and that she had no greatness in her to meet them. This was a calamity, but by no means caused by her own fault.

Sometimes she was touching in the attention she gave to the smallest detail connected with the training and the welfare of her children. One may say that even before the great catastrophe which fell upon her, her attention had been entirely concentrated on her babes. She liked to be present at all the daily routine of their existences, and whenever her daughters were to be produced before some of their relatives, she made it a point to superintend their toilet, and to brush their long hair. The girls were generally dressed in white, winter and summer, and it was only when they had reached their

twelfth year that she consented to dress them in dark colours during their school hours. But even then they had to change for dinner and to appear before their parents in the light gowns their mother was so fond of. Their clothes were always made in the best houses, and their linen just as dainty and magnificent as their mother's. In summer and on board the Imperial yacht, they were generally attired in sailor hats and blouses, and were allowed to run about as much as they liked, and to talk to the officers and sailors. They shared their mother's love for the sea, and the six weeks or so that these annual excursions in the Finnish waters lasted were the real holidays of the children as well as of the Empress.

The latter has also been accused of not showing any amiability in regard to the foreign guests who from time to time visited the Court of Czarskoi Selo. In this there may have been a certain amount of truth, but the apparent coldness of the young Czarina proceeded from the everlasting fear which haunted her that she might be compromised by showing herself too effusive towards strangers. She knew that any attention she showed to her visitors would be widely commented upon, and as

these with few exceptions were German princes, this circumstance added to her embarrassment, because she was very well aware that she was supposed to harbour strong Teuton sympathies. In regard to her English relatives she was handicapped, because the Queen of Great Britain was the sister of the Empress Dowager, and when she came to Rewal with King Edward, she was naturally more with Marie Feodorovna than with the niece with whom she had so very little in common, and who had done nothing whatever to win her sympathies.

From time to time the sister of the Czarina, Princess Henry of Prussia, put in an appearance at Czarskoi Selo, and her brother, the Grand Duke of Hesse, was also a frequent visitor there. But these visits were never official ones, and mostly passed unnoticed by the general public that had left off troubling about what went on in the home of the Sovereign. The members of the Imperial family were also rare visitors at Czarskoi Selo, and avoided putting in an appearance there unless absolutely compelled to do so. Alexandra Feodorovna knew so perfectly well how to convey to her guests the knowledge that they bored her that it

was no wonder they did not care to court this knowledge and that they preferred not to annoy her with their presence. The Empress Dowager used to appear on the family anniversaries, such as birthdays, name days, and others of the kind to offer her congratulations to her son and daughter-in-law, and every winter the young Czarina used to come to St. Petersburg from Czarskoi Selo to pay her mother-in-law one solemn visit of ceremony; after which the two ladies did not see each other for a long time. All this was abnormal, but once these relations had been established it was next to impossible to change them, and so the breach which separated my mistress from the world as well as from her husband's family widened and widened, until at last she found herself alone in presence of danger, of sorrow, and of one of the greatest catastrophes which history will ever record. Whether the fault was wholly hers or was shared by others, is a point upon which I shall not attempt to give an opinion.

CHAPTER XV

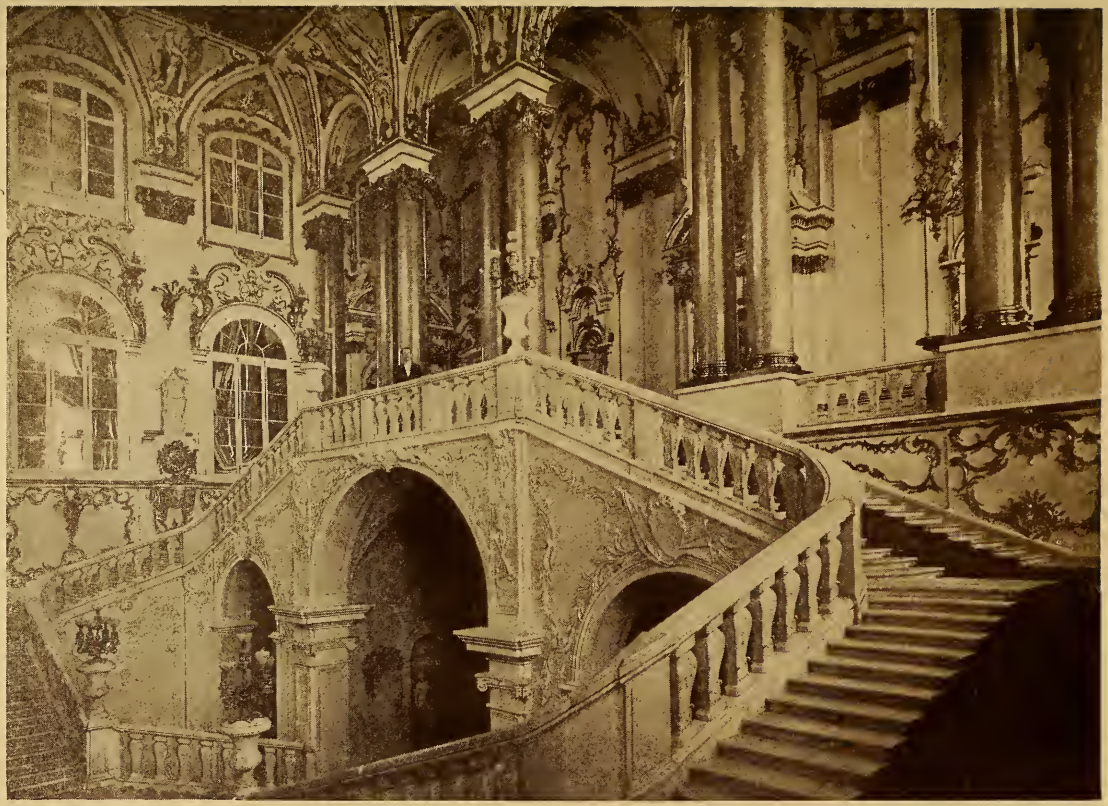
THE FIRST REVOLUTION

I OFTEN wondered whether the Empress had quite appreciated the magnitude of the first revolutionary movement which took place in Russia during and after the Japanese war. She had been repeatedly told that it was a mutiny of no importance, bound to be crushed by the government. The Czar as well as his ministers had purposely left her in the dark, the former because he did not wish to alarm her, and the latter because they feared that she might try, in presence of the danger which threatened the dynasty, to persuade her husband to adopt a more liberal form of administration, and to grant to Russia this Constitution for which everybody was clamouring, especially after the war had plainly proved that the autocratic régime was at an end. She could, however, sometimes hear echoes of the general dissatisfaction, and indeed the first person who pointed out to her its extent was the Empress Dowager, who knew very well all that was

going on, and who had made it a point to become as well-informed as possible of all that was taking place in the Empire. For once Marie Feodorovna appealed to her daughter-in-law to open the eyes of Nicholas II. as to the perils of the political situation, but she refused to do so, thinking that the request covered an intrigue of which she was to become the victim. And so time went on until Count Witte, who still enjoyed some popularity, spoke to the Emperor, and persuaded him to promulgate the famous Manifesto of the 17th October, and to call together a Representative Assembly. In a certain sense this was a victory for the Empress, for she had at that period more than once expressed her conviction that it would be to the advantage of the Russian nation to establish a constitutional form of government, as near as possible to the one which had proved so successful in England. But strange as it may appear to say so, she was at that very moment changing her opinions and rallying to those of the people who thought that every concession to the demands of the populace would bring about the ruin of the monarchy, just as the calling together of the States General in France in 1789 had brought about the fall of the

Bourbons and sent Louis XVI. finally to the scaffold. She had always compared her fate to that of Marie Antoinette, and had more than once expressed to her friends her conviction that she also was destined for some horrible fate. On the day when the first Duma was opened by the Emperor in the big ballroom of the Winter Palace, she cried the whole time that she was dressing, and it was almost with a feeling of horror that she allowed her maids to place on her head the big diadem of diamonds which formed part of the Crown jewels, and to hang about her neck the many rows of pearls and precious stones which lay in readiness for her. She was dreading the future and wondering what it would bring with it.

There is one incident concerning these momentous days which I must relate. When the population of St. Petersburg, headed by the notorious Gapone, repaired to the Winter Palace and asked to see the Sovereign, in order to lay their grievances before him, the Czarina was of the opinion that he ought to have received them and spoken with them. Her mother-in-law thought the same thing. But the ministers, and especially Count, then still Baron, Fredericks opposed it, and it was their advice



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THE GRAND STAIRCASE, WINTER PALACE, PETROGRAD

which prevailed, instead of that of the two Empresses. To tell the truth, Nicholas was not of a courageous nature, and but too ready to listen to those who told him that he ought not to expose his person to any danger.

But in presence of this new load of calamity that threatened her and her children my mistress more than ever put her trust in God, and prayed, prayed with more fervour than she had ever done before. Several times she interceded in favour of revolutionaries who had been sentenced to death for some political crime or other. This happened particularly in the case of a woman, Sophy Konoplianinova, who had murdered General Minn, the commander of the Semenovsky regiment, who had repressed with ruthless cruelty the Moscow Rebellion. The Empress wished to have her pardoned, but the Czar would not listen to her, and all her pleadings for mercy were in vain.

Is it to be wondered that racked as she was with cruel anxieties, and bred in an atmosphere of superstition, she set her belief more than ever in spiritism and consulted fortunetellers, and monks and priests who predicted to her a future devoid of cares, and one where worries would be unknown

to her? She listened to them, and with a blind faith in their many and varied predictions she proceeded to absorb herself more and more in practices of a religious devotion which finally mastered all her thoughts and left no room in them for anything else. She had fitted up in her bedroom an oratory full of sacred images, to which every day was added another icon. No Russian was ever a firmer believer in the different dogmas of the Orthodox Church than was this daughter of a German house, whose mother had been an intimate friend of the famous Strauss, and had allowed the latter to dedicate to her his life of Jesus which had caused such a profound sensation in literary, religious and philosophical circles all over the world.

The Revolution was finally mastered, and though the Duma always continued to show itself criticising and even rebellious, things began to settle down. Russia prepared to celebrate the anniversary of the Three Hundredth Year of the accession of the Romanoff dynasty to the throne, and great rejoicings were planned for the occasion. The Imperial family came to St. Petersburg for the first time since the Japanese war, and remained in the capital for four days. A solemn service of

thanksgiving was celebrated in the Kazan Cathedral, to which representatives of all the classes of the Empire were invited, and the nobility of St. Petersburg gave a big ball at which the whole Imperial family was present. I remember it so well, because it was the last occasion on which the Empress appeared in full state and wore the Crown Jewels. She had chosen a white satin dress all embroidered in silver, and had consented to put on what she did but rarely—the famous necklace of diamonds together with the tiara that had belonged to the Empress Catherine. She was still beautiful, but the slight figure that had been so conspicious in her young days, and the beautiful complexion which had been unrivalled, had disappeared. She looked a middle aged, haggard woman, racked with cares and anxieties, and though the splendid, sharp profile could never change, the mouth had altered, and its expression was almost tragic. She only remained for an hour at the ball, and retired before supper, leaving her daughters to the care of the Dowager Empress, who declared herself delighted at the thought of chaperoning them.

It was the girls' first appearance in society, and those who saw them then will never forget how

they looked. They were both dressed in pink, soft clouds of tulle, which suited them to perfection. Not regularly pretty, they had sweet faces, and such charming manners that one could not help being attracted by them. Rumours of their approaching marriages with the Crown Prince of Servia and the future heir to the Roumanian throne were afloat at the time, and added to the interest which they excited. Alas, alas, all these hopes were to prove fallacious, and St. Petersburg society, which had been so much attracted by these two Princesses, was never to see them again, at least as the daughters of a reigning Sovereign.

Dark rumours were already coursing at the time concerning the Empress and her affection for the terrible Rasputin who was to do her so much harm. In general she was unfortunate in her friendships, because the one which she formed for Madame Wyroubieva caused also much scandal. The Czarina with all her cleverness (and she was clever) had no judgment and did not possess the slightest knowledge of the world or of humanity. She believed all that she was told, and, if the truth be said, she was so anxious to please and to be liked that she accepted with joy and an amazing cre-

dulity the protestations of affection she met with. If she had only had a really good friend, so many of the mistakes which she made might have been avoided.

One of the people who did her the most harm was her own sister, the Grand Duchess Elizabeth. The latter was an ambitious person who conceived the plan to rule Russia through the Empress. She had entered a convent not at all out of any vocation for the religious life, but because she thought that it would give her prestige in the country, and that she might acquire there a position which it would have been impossible for her to obtain as the widow of a Grand Duke who had been murdered on account of his unpopularity and the hatred with which he was looked upon in the whole of Russia. She posed as a victim and she absolutely abused the privileges which this attitude conferred upon her. She used to worry the Czarina greatly, and whenever the latter objected to anything that she told her, or refused to comply with any of the continual requests she put forth, she threatened her with the punishment of Heaven, and told her that God would chastise her and take away from her her idolised son. She spent her time going about from

one convent to another, and in that way contrived to travel all over Russia and to win for herself a considerable number of adherents everywhere. Her plan was to force the Czar to rescind the Constitution which he had granted to his subjects and to return to the old forms of autocracy. It was she who had recommended Mr. Protopopoff and Mr. Sturmer to the Emperor, and she had managed to secure for herself, as well as for all the people who had sworn their allegiance to her, a prominent place in the administration of the State.

The Empress feared her and knew beforehand that she would in the long run be compelled to do whatever her sister required of her. Sometimes, however, she showed some impatience at the manner in which the latter "bossed" her, to use a vulgar expression, and then she would sulk and lock herself up in her room, refusing to see any one, upon which Elizabeth would sigh and make discreet allusions to the sad mental condition of the unfortunate Czarina. She certainly was the one who contributed the most to the popular belief that the Consort of Nicholas II. was not quite right in her mind.

The only person who would fight the Grand

Duchess, and not give in to her caprices, was Madame Wyroubieva, and perhaps this was one of the reasons why Alexandra Feodorovna grew so fond of her. The poor Empress wanted some one to fight her battles for her and felt grateful to any person capable of doing so. She had encountered so few willing to do it.

The Emperor Nicholas was very fond of his sister-in-law. She represented to him what he called the only real Russian element in the Imperial family, in the sense that he thought her so infeodated to the old Muscovite traditions which his uncles and cousins, and even his own brother and sisters, had renounced, and he fancied she would be better able than any one else to understand the wants as well as the idiosyncrasies of the Russian nation. He always listened to her with deference, and, bigoted as he was himself, felt ready to believe her when she assured him that the Almighty would always protect him, provided he kept faithful to the principles of that Orthodox Church which required from him the destruction of everything and every one that showed any antagonism to this autocracy of which he was the chosen representative. The Czar belonged to that class of people who only

listen to those who agree with them, and he had never learned anything, or profited by the lessons that one had tried to teach to him, no matter in what direction. He was a tyrant by character and by temper, whilst weak and irresolute, and this is a combination which is more often to be found than one would imagine.

At the time I am talking about my mistress was very unhappy. For one thing, she had very little hope left of the recovery of her son, and apart from the exaggerated love which she bore him, she felt that the difficulty of her own position would increase should the boy die. She had an almost morbid wish to hear people assure her that such a misfortune was not going to overtake her, and she eagerly caught at the assurances which Rasputin used to give her that so long as he remained at her side no harm could happen to little Alexis. She sincerely thought that this common peasant, by reason of his ignorance, would be better able than a more cultured person to come into touch with the Almighty, founding her belief on the words of the Gospel, that He "revealed himself to simple and ignorant people." The fact was that she had grown tired of all the false protestations with which

her ears were saturated, and she thought that perhaps a humble Russian mougik would at least show himself faithful to her as well as to her dynasty. How terrible was her mistake the future was to prove.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CZARINA'S FRIENDS

Alexandra Feodorovna did not make any real friends during the first years that followed upon her marriage. Indeed it was only after the Japanese war that she started the intimacies for which she was so much reproached by her subjects. The most notorious was that for Rasputin, but there were two others just as nefarious—that with Madame Wyroubieva and with the Princess Dondoukoff.

The latter was a lady of considerable intelligence and a physician of no mean skill whom the Empress had put at the head of the private hospital she had organised at Czarskoi Selo long before the war broke out. Later on when other lazarets and ambulances, the number of which increased every day as the terrific struggle went on, were organised in the Imperial residence, the Princess Dondoukoff was appointed general superintendent of all these establishments, and it was she who coached the Czarina as well as her daughters in the duties

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GRAND DUCHESS ELIZABETH

of a Red Cross nurse. She was of a pushing temperament, had the reputation of being loose in her morals, though personally I saw nothing that could have justified it, and was also gifted with a remarkable propensity for intrigue. No one liked her, but everybody feared her. She insinuated herself thoroughly into the confidence of the Empress, who referred to her in everything, and willingly listened to her. She was of course among the followers of Rasputin, and with him and Madame Wyroubieva formed a trio which it would have been difficult not only for the general public but also for the immediate attendants of the Russian Sovereign to fight against.

The Princess Dondoukoff used to give drugs to Alexandra Feodorovna which the latter used to take unknown to her medical attendants and which were declared by them, when they discovered the fact, to have had a good deal to do with her shattered nerves. This may or may not have been true, —I shall not venture an opinion upon the subject, —but certainly my mistress was far too fond of the Princess, and would have done better to have seen less of her, if only from the point of view that the weight which she laid on her opinions consider-

ably incensed the doctors who were in regular attendance upon her, who objected to the manner in which their own prescriptions were neglected.

The Princess introduced at Court a quack medical man from Thibet called Bachmanoff, who, she pretended, had brought with him from his country all kinds of secret remedies which she advised the Czarina to try on the little Grand Duke Alexis. The fond mother believed her, and Bachmanoff became one of her favourites. It is impossible to say whether he would have cured the child, because the latter's nurse, a sailor called Derewenko, of whom he was inordinately fond, and whom I have already had occasion to mention, threw out of the windows all the powders and potions which Alexandra Feodorovna asked him to give to her son, and took great care the boy should not get anything but what his own doctor had ordered him to take. Ultimately the Grand Duke got better and stronger, and last year he might have been pronounced cured, at least in so far as the chronic ailment from which he was suffering could be cured. But the Empress in her joy at this unexpected recovery was persuaded that it had taken place, thanks to the Thibetan, in whom she believed more than ever.

The friendship for Madame Wyroubieva was perhaps even worse than the attachment of the foolish Sovereign to the Princess Dondoukoff. Madame Wyroubieva was the daughter not of the Emperor's private secretary, as she represented herself to be, but of a State Secretary (which is quite a different thing, being a purely honorific position) called Tanieieff. She had been married to a navy officer with whom she could not agree, and they were divorced, not because he had grown mad, as she declared (divorce for insanity is not allowed in Russia), but because he had found reason to object to her conduct. The Empress, for reasons no one ever understood, took her part and invited her once or twice to the Palace of Czarskoi Selo. Madame Wyroubieva made the most of her opportunities and soon became quite indispensable to Alexandra Feodorovna. She it was who, with the Grand Duchess Elizabeth, introduced Rasputin into the Imperial household, and with him she established such control of the Czarina's actions that soon the latter became simply a tool in their hands.

Madame Wyroubieva was, above everything else, a grabbing woman. She fully meant to make a fortune out of the position of trust she was sup-

posed to occupy. Both she and Rasputin were in their turn in the hands of a gang of adventurers who used them for their own ends, and they set up a shameful exploitation of the public exchequer for which unfortunately the Empress was made responsible. The latter only looked upon Rasputin as a saintly personage, a kind of orthodox yogi whose prayers were sure to be taken into account by the Almighty. Terrible things have been hinted at in regard to her relations with him, but all that I can say is that to my knowledge, at least, she was never alone with him for one single moment, and that except in regard to the health of the heir to the throne, my mistress never spoke with him of anything else but religious subjects. The public said that he was all powerful at Court, but I feel convinced that these rumours arose from certain unscrupulous persons who had an interest in spreading them because they managed (thanks to the intimacy of which they boasted with a personage who, as they related, could turn and twist the sovereigns at his will and pleasure) to obtain army contracts and other things they desired. Among them were Protopopoff and Sturmer, and the notorious Manassevitsch Maniuloff, whose blackmail-

ing propensities caused him to be arrested and sentenced to several years' hard labour from which he was released by order of the present Russian government. Rasputin in reality was treated in the Palace as a kind of jester who was allowed to do as he wished—a sort of fool, after the pattern of Chicot in Dumas' novels, and neither Nicholas II., who liked him even better than did the Empress, nor the latter ever thought of him as of anything else than a holy pilgrim (for that was what he proclaimed himself to be) whose vocation was to go about preaching the gospel to the world. One must not forget that there have been many such in Russia, and that the natural tendency to mysticism, which is one of the characteristics of the Russian character, has always welcomed them with effusion. The Empress, who, though a German, was more superstitious than any Russian, fully believed that the presence of Rasputin at her side was a shield against all possible dangers. She therefore refused to be parted from him, and whenever anything happened of a nature to cause her worry she used to send for him, when he would prostrate himself on the ground and invoke the powers of Heaven to deliver him and his friends from evil. He was

a thorough fanatic, or at least professed to affect the ways of a fanatic, and he used to force the Empress to prostrate herself before holy images beside him, and to remain with her face pressed to the floor for hours in earnest supplication to a God whom, he averred, he was the only one to honour as he ought to be honoured. It is difficult to realise that an Empress of Russia, and one of the haughty temperament of Alexandra Feodorovna, could lend herself to such ridiculous practices, but so it was, and I can only say what I have seen without attempting to explain it. But it was not surprising that when the Imperial family came to hear of all this, it should have been indignant and tried to oust from the Palace a man whose presence in it tended to discredit royalty at a time when, on the contrary, every possible means should have been resorted to in order to raise its prestige.

The Empress Dowager, when she heard all that was going on, raised her voice, and, disliking though she did to meddle in what she considered did not concern her, she made representations to the Czar when the latter paid her a visit in Kieff, whither she had transferred her residence. Nicholas listened to her, but did nothing. Others fol-

lowed the example of Marie Feodorovna, and the Grand Dukes individually and collectively tried to open the eyes of the head of their dynasty to the evils caused by the presence of Rasputin. Everything proved useless, because the Emperor just as much as his wife was under the spell of the clever comedian whose strong will had completely mastered his own weak intellect. I have often witnessed the prayer meetings which were organised in the Czarina's private oratory, at which Rasputin presided. Few people were admitted to them, and the congregation generally consisted of Madame Wyroubieva, the Princess Dondoukoff, the Czar and his Consort. The Imperial children were sometimes told to attend them but not often. Rasputin used to pray aloud, and then preach, touching in his sermons on subjects of every kind that had not the remotest claim to be considered religious. And then he assured his audience that the Lord had revealed himself to him and ordered him to acquaint the Czar with such and such a thing, choosing the one he had at heart at that particular moment. The Empress generally went into hysterics whilst listening to him, and it was on that account I was asked to remain in the vicinity of the room,

so as to be able to come to her help. I had often to unlace her or else she would have choked, and for this purpose I took her into another apartment. The fact that one or other of her maids saw me carrying away some part of her clothes gave rise to the most malicious rumours. The most curious thing about it all was that the Emperor looked on unmoved whilst his wife was almost writhing in strong convulsions and extended no help whatever to her, because Rasputin assured him that these convulsions were a manifestation of the good spirits, and a proof that the prayers of the Czarina had been accepted by the Almighty.

I know that all this sounds incredible and yet it is but the truth. The unfortunate woman whom the world has slandered in the most cruel manner possible was after all nothing but a miserable being whose mental balance was unstrung, to say the least. It would have been more sensible to have put her in an asylum than to have accused her of immoral practices of which she was incapable. Of course others who were witnesses of the daily actions of Alexandra Feodorovna in Czarskoi Selo could not be expected to look at things with the same eyes as I did and I do not feel any surprise at

the disgust which filled all the good and devoted servants of the dynasty when they heard about these mysterious meetings during which the Holy Ghost was supposed to descend in person on the heads of Nicholas II. and his wife. There were some still in existence, among others the Princess Wassiltschikoff, one of the most prominent women in St. Petersburg society, who took it upon herself to write to my mistress to warn her of the manner in which she was discrediting herself and the dynasty. The Czarina was terribly offended on receiving this letter, and fell into one of her rare fits of passion. She complained to the Emperor, and the author of this epistle that had aroused her anger was forthwith ordered to leave St. Petersburg and to retire in disgrace to one of her estates in the country. Alexandra Feodorovna clenched her teeth and could hardly restrain her tears when speaking about what she called "this infamous letter." At that moment of rage I believe she could have killed the lady who had thus ventured to tell her things which she considered the most insolent she had ever heard in her whole life. She was destined to feel still more offended a few days later when the Grand Duke Nicholas Michaylovitsch,

a cousin of the Czar, presented to the latter a memorandum in which he adjured him not to listen any longer to the advice he received from his wife, and to dismiss the gang of adventurers whose presence at his side was discrediting him. He also was repaid by being sent into exile for the audacity with which he had dared to criticise the conduct of Alexandra Feodorovna.

There is, therefore, nothing surprising if those who had come to look upon Rasputin as upon a national danger should at last have made up their minds to remove him by fair means or foul. Of course what lay behind his assassination was the desire to put an end to the influence of the Empress over her Consort, and to pave the way towards her internment in a private asylum or in a convent where it was felt that she would be happier than anywhere else. So long as Rasputin existed such a thing was not to be thought of, but it was secretly hoped that if he were finally put out of the way the mind of the Czarina would snap altogether and it would then become a relatively easy matter to persuade Nicholas II. to separate himself from her, when it was hoped that the dynasty would recover some of the prestige which it had lost. This, so far as I

know, is the real key to the murder of the adventurer whose career constitutes a unique episode even in the annals of Russian history that has recorded so many queer things. In describing it I have anticipated events, and must now return a few years back and speak of the outbreak of the great war, even if superficially, because its declaration sounded the knell of the Romanoff dynasty and, in a certain way, sealed the fate of the illustrious lady at whose side I spent so many years before misfortune overwhelmed her.

CHAPTER XVII

THE GREAT WAR

It is useless to repeat that when the great war broke out no one in Russia expected it, the Czar least of all. I shall not touch upon the serious part of this awful drama; I only mention it in so far as it has to do with the unhappy Empress. She was quite overpowered by it, and thought it the culminating point of her misfortunes. Apart from her apprehensions for that Russia whose Sovereign she was, she felt deeply the fact that she was going to be at war with her own kith and kin, and with her beloved brother of whom she was so fond. No one doubted among her surroundings that France and Russia united together would surely and quickly beat the Germans, but the Czarina knew very well that whatever the outcome of the struggle she would become one of its principal victims. She was perfectly aware that the nation which disliked her so intensely called her the "German" quite openly, and that she would probably be sus-

pected of favouring the land of her birth in preference to that of her adoption; she chafed beforehand at the injustice of the accusation. Everybody noticed her intense emotion on the day which followed the declaration of hostilities, when, during the religious ceremony which took place in the Winter Palace, she stood beside the Czar, and listened to the reading of the manifesto announcing to the nation that Germany had challenged it to mortal combat. Before she left Peterhof (where the Court was spending the summer) for St. Petersburg, I ventured to express to her my hope that she would have sufficient strength to bear the fatigue and emotions of the trying day. "I can bear anything now," she replied. "Since I did not die yesterday, it seems to me that nothing will ever kill me." Momentous words which I was to remember more than once as time went on and one disaster followed upon another.

When the war broke out the Empress Dowager was in England. She telegraphed to her daughter-in-law to take her place at the head of the Red Cross until her return to Russia, and to take the first measures necessary to ensure its activity. The Czarina was but too willing to do so, but she en-

countered unusual opposition and even hostility on the part of the officials interested in the society, who criticised all the improvements which she suggested, and even refused to follow the instructions which she gave them. This, of course, was a source of bitter mortification to her, and she was but too glad to retire altogether from the management of the whole affair as soon as her mother-in-law returned. But this was wrongly interpreted by the public that said the Sovereign was not interested in the cause of the wounded, because she disapproved altogether of the war, and would have liked to see Russia come to an agreement with Germany.

The position of my unfortunate mistress grew more and more difficult as time went on. At first the triumphant (for so it was called) march of the Russian troops into Galicia and the capture of Lemberg seemed to point to a successful campaign, but then came the first reverses, followed by the great retreat which meant abandoning to the enemy some of the most fertile provinces of the Russian Empire and the whole of Poland. The loss of the whole line of fortresses which defended the Vistula was also an awful blow dealt both to Russia's might and to Russia's welfare as well as prestige. Of

course the whole country waxed indignant at this unexpected series of disasters, and of course the government was made responsible for them.

The want of foresight on the part of the War Office was attributed to the general corruption which existed in all Russian administrative spheres, and also to the partiality of the Czar for certain favourites, against whom he would never listen to any criticisms and whom he continued to employ though the whole country had recognised their utter incapacity.

The Empress knew all these things: she had even been asked more than once to interfere and to bring them to the notice of the Czar, but she had always refused to meddle in questions which she felt were so important that any false step might be accompanied by terrible consequences. Once during one of the flying visits which the Commander in Chief, the Grand Duke Nicholas, paid to St. Petersburg from the front, he had tried to enlist her sympathies in favour of a vast plan of reform he wanted to bring through, but she was so mistrustful of him that she had thought it better to do nothing but to declare to him that she did not think herself competent to offer advice in view of the

general difficulties presented by the situation. She felt frightened at the persistence with which certain people who were not over well disposed in her favour wanted to get her mixed up in matters where the smallest blunder might bring upon her head the wrath of the whole nation. But at the same time she attempted to do what she had never tried before, that is, to discuss with her husband the events of the day and give him the benefit of her opinions, which, though always moderate, were distinctly in favour of the continuance of the autocratic system. She once told me that she thought it would be far more advantageous to the nation if the Duma were permanently prorogued, at least for as long as hostilities lasted, because she feared for one thing that its criticisms would destroy the faith of the nation in its government, and for another, that it would prevent by the discussions it would be sure to raise the conclusion of a peace favourable to Russian interests. This peace the Czarina called for with all her heart, and she would have sacrificed much to see it concluded. This got to be known, the more so that she never even tried to hide it, and the rumour arose that she was negotiating the conditions of such a peace with her Ger-

man relations. This I do not believe for one moment she had ever done or wanted to do, but those intent on her destruction naturally accused her of intriguing in a sense favourable to German interests. She had unfortunately antagonised every single party in the country, the aristocracy to begin with, and also the extreme radicals and socialists who made her responsible for all the measures of repression which the government had begun to take against them. The poor woman had become the scapegoat of all the sins of Israel.

Nevertheless she fought bravely against these terrible odds, and she applied herself to give to the Czar some of the energy which he lacked, and of which perhaps she possessed too much. It was then that she paid different visits to the Front, a thing which she had never been allowed to do whilst the Grand Duke Nicholas was commander in chief, and she tried to cheer up her husband, and to encourage him in the new responsibilities which he had assumed when he had dismissed his uncle and taken upon himself the functions of Commander in Chief of the Army. He had been forced into his decision by the general wish of the public, who were dissatisfied with the Grand Duke Nicholas, and

hoped that the presence of the Sovereign at the head of his troops would infuse courage into the hearts of the latter and induce them to make every effort against the foe. But the troops were not to blame for the reverses which had overtaken them; the lack of ammunitions was the cause of the evil, and this could not be remedied by any commander in chief, but would have required a thorough and radical reform in the whole administration of the War Office.

There existed no one in Russia powerful enough to enforce this reform. In the circumstances in which the country found itself placed, it would have required the energy and the iron will of a Peter the Great to overcome the obstacles standing in the way of any reforms of a sweeping nature, and Russia had for sovereign Nicholas II., the weakest that had ever carried the sceptre of the Romanoffs.

During these anxious days the Empress took to confiding in me and sometimes called me to her side, generally during the night when she could not sleep and was haunted by all kinds of fears in regard to the future. She told me then that she felt persuaded a revolution would follow upon the war, and that this time it would be a serious one which

would require considerable energy before it would be suppressed. The idea that it might eventually prove successful never entered her mind, and I have often wondered at her utter blindness in this matter. But she felt so convinced that the greater part of Russia was still attached to the principles embodied in an all-powerful autocracy that no one was taken more unawares than herself by the promptitude with which the Russian nation accepted the overthrow of the dynasty. And yet she had been told often enough that this dynasty was in danger if it did not decide to make concession to public opinion that clamoured for a change. She still nursed illusions, and she honestly believed that her personal efforts in favour of wounded and disabled soldiers had made her popular with the army, that it felt grateful to her and to the Czar, and that it would not allow them to be harmed. She liked to relate anecdotes tending to prove this, and whenever she returned to Czarskoi Selo from one of the frequent visits she made to the Front, after the Emperor had assumed the supreme command, she liked to call me to her side and relate to me all that she had seen whilst there, and how the wounded whom she had visited had thanked her for her kind-

ness towards them, not knowing that their thanks had been uttered in obedience of a command and had never proceeded from the heart of those who had uttered them. There had come, however, one fatal day when, instead of the cheers to which she had been used, the Empress was received with a dead silence by the troops when she accompanied her husband to a review of regiments about to be sent to the fighting Front. This was the first time that such a thing had happened to her, and the poor Czarina was so upset by this proof that she had lost the affection of her soldiers that she declared she would no longer show herself among them. Of course her friends tried to cheer her up, and to explain to her that this had been a pure accident, but the impression had been produced, and its effects were to be lasting ones. The first two years of the war dragged on, and sometimes I wondered whether my beloved mistress would ever live to see the end of this awful conflict. She was getting weaker and weaker and her nerves were so entirely destroyed that all those who still cared for her were getting quite alarmed on her account. The Emperor alone seemed quite unconcerned and failed to notice the great change that had come over his wife. He

imagined that she was anxious about the war, but did not dream that her health was getting worse every day and that she had lost the energy she had been endowed with before, in the hopeless struggle she was fighting against forces which were bound to overcome her in the long run. All her former vivacity had left her. She had become sweeter than she had ever been, even during her first years of married life, and she accepted with gratitude every small service one rendered her. The haughty pride with which she had in former times met any unpleasantness that occurred to her had disappeared. She had become resigned to everything that might befall her, but her great anxiety was for her husband and children, especially the former, against whom she dreaded an attempt at assassination whenever he was at the Front. During the sleepless nights which had become her portion she fancied all kinds of evils, and then she would proceed to the telephone which put her in direct communication with headquarters and speak with the aide-de-camp on duty, asking for news of the Emperor. I do not think that she ever obtained more than an hour or two of repose in the twenty-four, and sometimes, when considering this,

I did not, as I had previously, blame the Princess Dondoukoff for administering to her opiates destined to give her some rest. All this constituted a terrible state of things, but still it was nothing in comparison with what was to follow, and the unfortunate Czarina was soon to drink to the very dregs the cup of sorrow that had been destined for her.

CHAPTER XVIII

DISASTERS AND THE SECOND REVOLUTION

The last days of the year 1916 were sad ones for my poor Empress. First came the assassination of Rasputin, which was a terrible source of grief for her, because she firmly believed that so long as he was at her side no harm could befall her, and certainly as events turned out she had not been so far wrong in her superstitious fears. During the first days which followed upon the murder of her favourite she would sit motionless for hours in her boudoir, doing nothing, absorbed in thoughts which must have been most painful. Christmas—the last to be passed by the Imperial family in their beloved Czarskoi Selo—was a sad one, and the Czarina did not even attempt to shake off the melancholy forebodings with which she was troubled. She was preoccupied with the idea of avenging the destruction of the man whose existence she had considered in the light of a fetich. It

is a well-known fact that she caused the young Grand Duke Dmitry to be exiled in Persia, as a punishment for his share in the conspiracy that had deprived her of her favourite. She who had always been so kind turned cruel and merciless, and I once heard her exclaim that henceforward she would no longer listen to her heart, but follow only the dictates of her reason.

There was one man who had obtained her favour on account of the ardour with which he had espoused all her views; this was the Minister of the Interior, Mr. Protopopoff. He had been one of the most intimate friends of Rasputin, and he was continually urging upon the Czarina the necessity of being firm, and of refusing mercy to those who had shown themselves so entirely merciless in regard to a man who had been a holy creature. Alexandra Feodorovna found some consolation in her grief by talking it over with Protopopoff, who finally won her adhesion to the plans which he had formed to establish once more in Russia an absolute government.

Christmas had come and gone and a New Year had begun. The difficulties of the military and economical condition of the country had increased

to an alarming degree. We did not perceive it at Czarskoi Selo, but in Petrograd, as St. Petersburg now was called, everybody was complaining of the high cost of living and the impossibility of procuring for oneself the indispensable necessities of existence. The population was getting impatient, and dissatisfaction was spreading. Those who could see the signs of the approaching storm tried to persuade the Czar that he had better remain in the vicinity of the capital, and not go to the Front where, after all, his presence was not absolutely needed. But Nicholas II. would not listen, perhaps because both his wife and Mr. Protopopoff persuaded him that there existed no reason for alarm. The Empress had implicit confidence in the Minister and was convinced that a small display of energy on the part of the government would very quickly do away with the impatience of the population. She wished to get her husband out of the way, not at all, as has been said, because she wanted to make a coup d'état, but because she did not wish the Czar to be worried by his family, who were making frantic efforts to get the Grand Duke Dmitry recalled from exile. At first her intention had been to accompany Nicholas II. to head-

quarters, but then her children had fallen ill with what had been considered at first an attack of influenza, but subsequently turned out to be measles, and she would not leave them. The Emperor departed, promising to return immediately if any serious trouble occurred, and keeping meanwhile in close touch with his wife and the commander of the garrison of Czarskoi Selo. During his absence the Revolution took place, brought about by a revolt of the troops entrusted with the defence of Petrograd. They went over to the Duma as soon as they heard that it had taken upon itself to institute a new government.

The Czar had been surrounded by traitors, therefore he had not even been apprised of all that was taking place in Petrograd. Two urgent telegrams which were despatched to him by the President of the Duma, Mr. Rodzianko, never reached him, as we heard later on. Had he received them it is likely he would have hastened back, and perhaps his presence in the capital might have averted the catastrophe. But his attendants were mostly won over to the cause of the Revolution and purposely left him in ignorance of the gravity of the events which were taking place, until it was too late.

The Empress also was not informed of the extent of the revolt, and it was through an indiscretion of one of her servants that she got at last an inkling of the truth. She sent for Count Benckendorff, the head of the household, and asked him to get her all the information possible concerning the extent of the rebellion. The Count, who throughout this sad story behaved with the greatest loyalty to the cause of the sovereigns whose confidence he had won by his long and faithful services, tried to go to Petrograd, where he hoped to learn some details as to what had taken place during the two preceding days, but found it impossible because the railway line was already in the hands of the revolutionaries, and no train from Czarskoi Selo was allowed to proceed. He had perforce to content himself with the news which he could obtain by telephone, and soon this means of communicating with the people likely to keep him informed as to what was going on was stopped.

The Empress, almost mad with anxiety, walked to and fro in her apartments, wringing her hands, and saying the whole time that she knew the Czar had been killed and the news was being kept from her. It was with the greatest difficulty that she

could be prevailed upon to send a telegram to General Roussky, who was then supposed to be loyal, enquiring after the Emperor. In about two hours she received a reply saying that Nicholas II. was on his way to Pskoff and expected to arrive there that same night.

This somewhat allayed the anxieties of the Empress, and just about then the condition of the Grand Duchess Olga, who had taken the measles in a more serious form than her sisters, became suddenly worse, and she was thought to be in danger, as pneumonia had declared itself and complicated her condition. And then Alexis, who had been removed to another wing of the palace in the hopes that he might escape the contagion, sickened in his turn, so that the unfortunate Czarina had another anxiety to fight, which after all was perhaps the best thing that could have happened to her, because the necessity of attending to her children prevented her from brooding on what was happening to her husband, which otherwise she would have done the whole of the time.

The next thing we heard was that the Duma had sent two delegates to confer with the Czar; we hoped that from this conference something good

might result, and that Nicholas II. would be induced to call together a responsible ministry. The Empress herself was persuaded he would do so, and remarked that if Prince Lvoff accepted the position of Premier, things would not be so bad, because at heart he was a loyal monarchist and would not lend himself to any aggression against the person of his Sovereign. She seemed more cheerful than she had been for the last two or three days, and showed herself pleased that it was Mr. Gutchkoff, whom she knew personally and had always liked, who had been despatched to Pskoff. "Perhaps, after all, we shall weather this storm," she remarked, and she further observed that in the grave circumstances which resulted from the unfavourable course the war had taken, it was perhaps just as well if the sole responsibility for what was to follow did not rest upon the Sovereign alone. Neither she nor any of us had the faintest idea of what was actually taking place at Pskoff. About midnight I left the Empress. She had been persuaded to retire to bed, the Princess Dondoukoff having promised to watch by the children and to call her at once should any change take place in their condition. She was thoroughly ex-

hausted and we were all glad to see her at last take some rest. I had lain down also in a room adjoining the bedchamber of my mistress when at about three o'clock in the morning I was awakened by a soft knock at my door. Thinking that one of the children was worse, I got up instantly and went to hear what had happened before disturbing the Empress. Standing on the threshold I found the Czarina's old groom of the chamber with a pale and frightened countenance. He pulled me aside and in a terrified voice exclaimed: "Something dreadful has happened: the Emperor has abdicated!"

"What?" I exclaimed, not believing my ears, and inclined to think that the man had gone mad.

"The Emperor has abdicated," he repeated, and forthwith began to sob.

I dropped down in a chair, and thought that the end of the world had come, and so indeed it had—of a certain world at least.

"Who told you?" I enquired. "How did you come to hear it?"

The man replied that the new ministry had advised the commander of the town of Czarskoi Selo by telephone that the Czar had abdicated in favour

of his brother, and that the troops had to be advised of the fact immediately.

"How shall we tell the Empress?" was my first thought.

Of course neither my informer nor myself could undertake the painful task of apprising her of the new misfortune which had overtaken her. We decided that the only thing to do was to inform Count Benckendorff and to ask him to perform the sad mission. But as we were proceeding to his apartments we met him coming to those of the Empress. He had also been informed of what had taken place at Pskoff a few hours before, and he was about to communicate them to my unfortunate mistress. I went back and aroused her. She was not sleeping, and got up immediately. She had been bracing herself all the time for some new calamity, and when told that Count Benckendorff wished to speak with her had felt convinced that he wanted to apprise her that her husband had been murdered. In comparison with such a catastrophe, the loss of her throne seemed a small thing, and perhaps her first feeling was one of relief at finding that her apprehensions had been groundless. But what she could not bring herself to un-

derstand was the fact that it had not been in favour of his son that the Czar had abdicated. "There must be a mistake. It is impossible that Niky has sacrificed our boy's claims!" she kept repeating. But when at last compelled to believe that such had been the case, she gave vent to an expression of rage which showed how thoroughly she despised the weak-minded man to whom she was bound, and exclaimed: "He might at least in his fright have remembered his son!"

I think that these words are the most cruel condemnation that the cowardice of Nicholas II. ever obtained, and deserved.

As may be imagined, there was no sleep for any of us after this. When dawn appeared at last it found the Empress entirely dressed, already calm and resigned, kneeling before the sacred icons in her oratory, and invoking the protection of God for her children. Then she went up to her daughters' room and acquainted the two younger ones, who had not yet been attacked by measles, of the change which had taken place in their destinies. The girls were stunned, as may easily be imagined, and Anastasia, the youngest, began to cry. The

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GRAND DUCHESS ANASTASIA

Empress watched her tears and then in a hard voice remarked, "It is too early to cry yet; keep your sorrow for another occasion," and she went out of the room without adding another word.

But though she was told that her son's condition was serious, she did not approach his sick-bed that whole day. It seemed as if she could not bring herself to look upon the child whose advent into the world had been such a source of joy to her, and who had been despoiled of the great heritage to which he had been born. It was evident to all those who knew her well that some time would have to elapse before she could bring herself to forgive her husband for the injury he had done their only son, and perhaps she would never have forgiven it had it not been for all the other misfortunes which were to follow upon this hasty abdication.

CHAPTER XIX

HOW THE CZARINA WAS ARRESTED

A FEW dreadful days followed upon the one which had brought us the news of the abdication of the Czar. The Empress tried to get into communciation with him, but though she contrived to speak with him over the wire, it was from the first evident that every word was listened to, and she gave up any attempt at confidential conversation. What worried her was that instead of returning to Czarskoi Selo, Nicholas II. had elected to go to Mohilew. My mistress, who had had absolute confidence in General Roussky, did not trust General Alexieieff, whom she considered as quite capable of betraying the Czar out of ambition. Events proved that she had not been wrong in her appreciation as to the General, and what she did not know, but was to learn much later, was that he had practically made it impossible for the Emperor to return to Czarskoi Selo, and almost compelled him to go to Headquarters, where he intended to keep

him until the Provisional Government at Petrograd had made up its mind whether it ought or ought not to arrest the former Sovereign. We all of us remained in utter ignorance of what was happening at the Front, or in Petrograd itself. The Czarina on the evening of the day following the abdication, when it had become already known that the Grand Duke Michael had refused to accept the throne relinquished to him by his brother, and when no one knew what was going to happen further, the Czarina called me to her room, and asked me to try to go to Petrograd and find out what people there were thinking about the whole situation. She gave orders for a carriage to be put at my disposal, as the railway trains did not run regularly, but I declined it, thinking that it would only attract attention and invite the rebels to stop me if any among them met me. I repaired alone and on foot to the railway station, where I boarded the first train that was leaving for the capital. No one noticed me, and I made my way undisturbed to the house of a friend, who, I knew, was likely to be well informed as to what was going on. Great was my surprise to find that she did not care at all to receive me, and almost ordered me out of her

apartment, saying that it was as much as her life was worth to talk with a personal attendant of the Empress. She absolutely refused to answer any of my questions, and I had perforce to beat a hasty retreat. Other people whom I sought did exactly the same thing, and I found all my acquaintances echoing the general opinion which, I discovered, was prevalent in the capital, that it was the Czarina who, by her betrayal of Russia to the Germans, had been the cause of a Revolution which all the sane and reasonable members of society were deploring. The one subject of lamentation was the want of character, as they called it, of the Grand Duke Michael, who, according to the general opinion, ought not to have played into the hands of the Revolutionaries and refused his brother's succession. At that time the idea of a Republic, which now has become a familiar one, had not yet taken hold of the public mind, and people were only desirous of seeing established a constitutional monarchy. What made me quite aghast was to find that the rumour had been spread that this refusal of the Grand Duke was due to an intrigue of the Empress, who had, so it was related to me, caused to be conveyed to him a message to the effect that

should he dare to accept the throne she would put herself at the head of a movement against him. The very thought that my poor mistress could have done such a thing was ridiculous, but in times of crisis like the one we were going through, the wildest tales are believed, and in the case of Alexandra Feodorovna it was but too easy to make Petrograd accept the idea that she was planning to bring forward the rights of her son, even against the desire of her husband. As I proceeded along the Nevsky Prospect I met sandwich men carrying large placards with seditious inscriptions concerning the Czarina, and on one of them her immediate imprisonment, trial for high treason and execution were put forward and claimed. Cries of "Down with Alexandra Feodorovna!" were heard everywhere, and my heart sank within me at the thought that perhaps my beloved mistress would fall a victim to the fury of the mob. The remembrance of the French Revolution and of Marie Antoinette, to whom the Empress was so fond of comparing herself, came back to me, and without waiting for further news (which I did not know where to obtain, because no one in Petrograd seemed to know anything) I made my way back to Czarskoi Selo, and

before presenting myself to the Czarina, I sought Count Benckendorff, to whom I related my experiences in the capital. The Count listened to me, and looked very grave when I mentioned to him the exasperation, for it could hardly be called otherwise, of the rough elements of the population of Petrograd against Alexandra Feodorovna. We discussed for a few minutes the possibility of removing her from the Palace to some other place where she would be in comparative safety, but gave up the idea as impracticable, because, for one thing, the Empress would never have consented to abandon her sick children, and then, there was already such a close watch established around the Palace of Czarskoi Selo and its inmates, that it would have been next to impossible for any one to get out without the fact being at once reported to the Revolutionary Government. Besides, it was necessary to learn what the Emperor himself meant to do, and what were his plans for the future. The situation was therefore extremely serious, but all that one could do in the present circumstances was to wait. The Count enquired of me the names of the servants among the personal attendants of the Czarina whom I thought quite trustworthy, and I men-

tioned a few. He considered it necessary to establish a kind of secret guard around her for fear that an assassin might find his way to her apartments, and indeed for three days and nights he remained himself outside her door, not caring to trust her safety to any one else. If ever there was one faithful man in the world it was Count Benckendorff.

When, after my conversation with him, I entered the presence of my mistress I found her in a violent state of agitation. The news had reached her that the Empress Dowager had gone to Mohilev to see her son, and Alexandra Feodorovna felt persuaded that the journey had been undertaken for the purpose of persuading Nicholas II. to separate himself from his wife. It was quite useless to point out to the distressed Princess that such a thing would not have had any motive at the present time, when the Czar had resigned the throne. She would not listen to me, but cried and sobbed, declaring that nothing in the world would ever part her from her children and that she would rather kill herself than give them up. She could not understand how it was that her husband, of whose affection she had felt so sure, had not al-

ready returned to her, especially in view of the fact that all her children were so dangerously ill. The idea that Nicholas was no longer a free agent, or able to do what he liked, had not occurred to her, and when I pointed out to her that such might be the case, she would not listen to me, exclaiming, "Who could dare to stop him? After all, he is always the Czar." The magnitude of the catastrophe which had just taken place she had not yet appreciated.

But the same night rumours that the Revolutionary Government had decided to arrest the former Sovereign reached Czarskoi Selo. None among us would credit them in the beginning, so utterly impossible did the whole thing seem. But Count Benckendorff, who perhaps had at his disposal sources of information others did not possess, told us that unfortunately the news was but too true and that delegates had been sent to Mohilev with instructions to take captive Nicholas II. What they meant to do with him he could not tell, and for the matter of that no one knew. The question arose as to how the Empress was to be made acquainted with this new misfortune, and it had not yet been decided by the Count, who wished to wait

for an official confirmation of the rumour, when he was called to the telephone and told that the new commander of the military district of Petrograd, General Korniloff, wanted to speak with him.

The General told Count Benckendorff that he had been commissioned by the new government to deliver a certain message to the Empress, whom he affected to call Alexandra Feodorovna, and that he wished to see her immediately about it. To the reply that Her Majesty was sitting beside the bed of her sick children and could not be disturbed, Korniloff declared that it was imperative he should execute his commission, and that unless the Empress complied with his request he should use force to obtain admittance.

There remained nothing to do but to ask him to wait for a few minutes until the Czarina had been communicated with. Count Benckendorff repaired to her apartments, and communicated to her the curt request of the Commander in Chief. She said at once that she would be ready for him in half an hour, and declared that she was sure he had some bad news for her concerning the Emperor.

"Perhaps they have killed him!" she exclaimed,

"and then they will kill me, and what will become of these poor children?"

Korniloff arrived at the Palace accompanied by all of the officers of his staff. He was escorted also by an infantry battalion, which he caused to be stationed in the big square in front of the Palace. Received by Count Benckendorff, he was conducted to the large drawing-room in which the Empress used to give her audiences in the days gone by, and in a few minutes the Sovereign entered the apartment, dressed all in black, with no other ornaments but one row of pearls round her neck. She bowed stiffly and, having sat down, motioned to the General to do the same, asking him at the same time to what she was indebted for the honour of his visit. There was a ring of irony in her voice which, as I was told afterwards, struck all the listeners painfully and must have offended the General. He rose and in rude accents said: "I must request you, Madam, to stand up, and to listen with attention to the commands I am about to impose upon you."

Alexandra Feodorovna raised her eyes in mute surprise, but without protesting rose up from her seat, a thing which, by the way, I never understood

how she could have done. Korniloff then proceeded to read to her an order signed by all the ministers, which declared that she was to consider herself under arrest, that she was forbidden to receive or to send any letters without the permission of the officer in charge of the Palace of Czarskoi Selo, that she was not to walk out alone in the park or grounds, and that she was to consider herself obliged to execute any further orders that might be given to her. He announced to her at the same time that he was about to change the guard at the Palace and that she would be strictly watched.

A dead silence reigned in the room after these words of the old soldier. Count Benckendorff, who was present, felt as if the earth had opened under his feet, but he deemed it inadvisable to say anything. The Empress simply bowed her head, then asked Korniloff not to remove her children's attendants until they were recovered from their illness, and especially to allow the sailor who for years had taken care of little Alexis to remain with him. The General said that he had no objection to this; then she simply turned her back upon him and without saying anything further left the room. Korniloff then gave his instructions to Count

Benckendorff, who, when he was left alone with him, entreated not to be dismissed, declaring that he meant to share the fate of his masters in any case. The Commander made him then responsible for all the interior arrangements of the Palace, and advised him that for the future he should have to apply to the State Treasury and not to the administration of the former Sovereign's private fortune for the money necessary for current expenses, and he requested him to be as economical as possible in the matter of these expenses.

The Empress, as if dazed, went to her bedroom. There I was waiting for her. One look at her face was sufficient to make me realise that something absolutely dreadful had taken place. Alexandra Feodorovna threw herself face downwards on a sofa placed at the foot of her bed, and exclaimed between the most heartrending sobs: "We are lost, we are lost! What will become now of these unfortunate children; what will become of them?" And for a long time she sobbed on, and would not be comforted by anything that I could say.

News of the arrest of the unfortunate Sovereign spread like lightning through the whole Palace, and, as if she had been stricken with the plague,

nearly all her attendants left her in the space of a few hours. Out of her six maids, only one remained "true to her salt," as they say in the East, and even the women who had waited on the Grand Duchesses hastened to pack their things and to run away, in spite of the fact that the young Princesses were known to be desperately ill. The Princess Dondoukoff was removed by order of Korniloff, and for two days the sick children were attended only by their mother and myself. The Empress was experiencing in the most cruel way imaginable the ingratitude of mankind. If Count Benckendorff had not had his own cook prepare her meals, she would have been exposed to death from hunger amidst all the splendours of her magnificent Palace. At last the Count had to apply to the Revolutionary Government, and servants were sent to replace those who had abandoned us, and to ensure the regular service of the prisoners. All through these dreadful days none of us knew what had happened to the Czar, and this incertitude was, as can easily be imagined, adding to the misery and anguish of his wife. At last Count Benckendorff received a wire from Prince Dolgoroukoff (not Dolgorouky, as the foreign papers have printed; they are two

distinct families), one of the attendants of Nicholas II., that the deposed Sovereign was being brought back to Czarskoi Selo, where the Revolutionary Government had decided he was for the present to be interned.

The news was immediately communicated to the Empress and proved a consolation to her in her sorrows. We all of us, the few who were left of the splendid retinue of servants of former days, wondered how our master would look, and braced ourselves for the painful task of receiving him, a prisoner of state, in the Palace where he had ruled as an all-powerful autocrat. It was on a dark and dreary March morning that he returned to us. Strict orders had been given to the soldiers composing the guard in charge of the Palace gates not to treat him otherwise than they would a colonel, (he had persisted all through his reign in wearing a Colonel's epaulettes), because he was henceforward to be known as plain Nicholas Alexandrovitsch Romanoff, and though we had been apprised of the fact, yet we were not prepared for what was to follow, and we were horrified to see, from the window at which we watched, the officer on duty give orders to salute Prince Dolgoroukoff, who sat be-

side the Emperor in the automobile that brought them home, with the honours due to his rank as general, whilst the deposed Sovereign was treated as his inferior. The meaning of the Revolution had never been made so plain to us as by this significant incident.

At the top of the staircase of the Palace, Count Benckendorff, dressed in full uniform, was awaiting Nicholas II., whom he received with the same ceremonial as in the time when he was still on the throne. The noble-hearted gentleman showed in those days of adversity of what stuff he was made, and did all that lay within the limits of his power to atone for the neglect and ingratitude of others.

The Emperor hardly greeted him. He rushed up the stairs, taking two steps at a time, towards the apartments of the Empress. Alexandra Feodorovna was standing on the threshold, pale and lovely, with a hectic bloom on her cheeks which reminded one of the glory of her past beauty and youth. Neither husband nor wife could speak as they fell into each other's arms.

CHAPTER XX

LIFE IN PRISON

It was only on the first day which followed upon the return of Nicholas II. at Czarskoi Selo that he was allowed to see his wife without witnesses. The very next morning Korniloff again appeared at the Palace and delivered the following instructions to the gaolers (one can hardly call them otherwise) who were to watch over the deposed monarch and his family:

I. The Emperor was not to be allowed to communicate with his Consort, except during meal-times, when of course conversation could touch only upon indifferent subjects. When he wanted to visit his children, with whom he was allowed to remain as long as he liked, the Empress was to leave the room immediately he had entered it.

II. Neither the Sovereign nor his Consort were allowed to walk out alone and unattended in the park and grounds, but were always to be escorted

by a non-commissioned officer and three soldiers with armed rifles.

III. When they went to church they were to be brought to the private chapel of the Palace by the same escort, and not permitted to converse with each other.

IV. Every time one of their attendants had to see them he or she had to be thoroughly searched by the officer on duty and a woman specially appointed for the purpose.

The young Grand Duchesses, when they had recovered, were not put under the severe control to which their parents were subjected; they could stay with their parents, and especially with the Emperor, as much and as long as they liked. Olga made use of this permission more than her sisters, and she used to spend hours with her father, to whom she was particularly attached. But at the same time a strict though not so apparent watch was kept over their actions, and they were not permitted to leave the Palace grounds for the town of Czarskoi Selo, not even to visit the numerous hospitals where they had hitherto worked as sisters of charity.

None of the numerous members of the Imperial

family, who were nearly all in Petrograd, manifested a desire to see the chief of their race; on the contrary, in many cases they went over to the cause of the Revolution, as, for instance, the Grand Duke Cyrill, who was the first to lead the troops of which he had the command to the Duma, to swear allegiance to the new government. But several members of the former household of the unfortunate sovereigns came to put themselves at their disposal, among others old Madame Narischkine, the Mistress of the Robes of the Empress, who, though she had never been liked by the latter, remained faithful to her to the end, and even petitioned to be allowed to go to Siberia with her, a request which was refused her by the government.

The Czar accepted all these irksome regulations with complete indifference. He used to take long walks with Count Benckendorff and Prince Dolgoroukoff, with whom he chatted the whole of the time with the most complete unconcern. He did not seem to mind in the very least the presence of the men deputed to escort him during these walks, but on the contrary made it a point to thank them when they had brought him home, and to exchange a few words with them. He used to read the

papers very regularly, and seemed always anxious to learn what was going on at the Front. The Empress, on the contrary, refused absolutely to submit to the irritating restrictions imposed upon her, and during the whole time that she was kept at Czarskoi Selo never once went out of the Palace, not caring to take her walks under the watchful eyes of an escort. She treated everybody with complete disdain. When the Czar entered the room where she generally sat with her children, she made him a deep and respectful curtsey, and immediately quitted the apartment, before the officer on duty had an opportunity to request her to do so. She had never got over the fact of Korniloff having ordered her to stand up whilst he had read to her the orders of the new government, and more than once in her conversations with me had referred to this cruel humiliation, repeating, "Can you imagine! He made me stand up, me, the Empress of Russia," and she did not care to incur a similar humiliation a second time. Though she was repeatedly told that her health required her to be in the open air, especially when spring arrived, she would not listen to any remonstrances on the subject, but kept strictly indoors, snatching only

breaths of fresh air from her window which she used to keep wide open, and beside which she sat working at garments and bandages for soldiers, which she asked me to forward to the Red Cross. She never opened a book or glanced at a paper, and except needlework her only occupations consisted in going to church and giving lessons to her youngest children. She refused every kind of sympathy and remained silent and forlorn in her misery until the day when she was told that she was about to exchange her present prison for another, far worse in every respect.

A few days after the one which had seen her confined in captivity a commission sent by the Government had arrived at Czarskoi Selo to ask the Empress to deliver to its keeping the crown jewels, as well as her private ones. She had consented to receive the members of this commission and told them that so far as the crown jewels were concerned they had never been in her charge and could be found in the Winter Palace; but her own diamonds and pearls belonged to her personally and she was not going to give them up unless compelled by force to do so, when she would solemnly protest against an act which she considered in the light of

a robbery pure and simple. Her attitude was so firm that the commissioners withdrew without having achieved their mission, and afterwards Kerensky, to whom the matter was referred, gave up the point and allowed my mistress to retain possession of the ornaments she had clung to with such determination and energy.

But the silver which adorned the Imperial dining table was all seized by the Government, under the pretext that it was State property, until eventually Nicholas II. found himself without one fork or knife with which to eat. At last Count Benckendorff made an arrangement wherewith part of this confiscated silver was bought back by him and the money handed over to the treasury. But as the private fortune of the Czar had been confiscated, it was the young Grand Duchesses, Olga and Tatiana, who out of their own funds redeemed these things.

In general it became extremely difficult to meet the expenses of the Imperial household, because the government refused to supply the means to do so, and the treasury grumbled at every request made by Count Benckendorff for funds. Every day saw something disappear of the former luxury

which had presided at the daily existence of the Czar and of his family, until at last life at Czarskoi Selo became almost ascetic in its simplicity. Meals consisted only of three courses, and the favourite, Zakuska, or relishes with which every Russian dinner or lunch begins, were suppressed. Wine disappeared altogether from the table, and several automobiles were sold, whilst the chauffeurs were dismissed. I even had to beg the Empress not to use as much linen as she had been in the habit of doing formerly, because we lacked the means to wash it, and these were but small miseries among the more important ones which assailed us.

Among the many annoyances and indignities put upon the Emperor and Empress was the order given by the Revolutionary Government not to address them any more as Your Majesty, but to call them Colonel and Mrs. Romanoff. The Czar took it good-humouredly, or, rather, contemptuously, but the Empress was extremely affected by this insolence. "We have been crowned in Moscow," she used to say, "and nothing can change this now. The Czar is always the Czar. No one can rob him of this dignity, even if he has renounced it of his own accord."

Of course when we were alone with her we addressed her in the old style. Beginning with Count Benckendorff, and ending with the last of the few servants who had voluntarily elected to remain in the service of the former sovereigns, we were very careful not to make them feel more than could be helped the change that had taken place in their destinies. But when one of the officers on guard was present it was more difficult, because he used to reprove us quite aloud if we ventured to speak with our master and mistress in the old respectful way to which we had been used. The government was so particular in the matter of the title allowed to Nicholas II., that all the newspapers which were addressed to him bore the superscription of "Colonel Nicholas Alexandrovitsch Romanoff." And on the letters which the Empress received, the appellation of "Her Majesty the Empress" was scratched out, and replaced by "Alexandra Feodorovna Romanoff." It was the repetition of what had taken place with Louis XVI. when he was designated by the name of Capet by his gaolers, and, strange as it may appear, it was among all her misfortunes the one which, out-

wardly at least, seemed most to affect the unhappy Empress.

Of course correspondence was a forbidden thing for all of us. Letters were strictly censored and even the smallest parcel brought to the Palace was examined two or three times before being handed over to the person to whom it belonged. Books were equally the object of suspicion, and at last the Empress and Emperor gave orders that new ones were no longer to be forwarded to them, as had been done previously.

Of course all these vexatious measures depended a good deal on the personality of the officer in charge of the interior arrangements and guard of the Palace. If he were a humane man things would not be so bad, but if he happened to belong to the ranks of the rabid republicans or anarchists there was not an obstacle that he did not put in our way or an unpleasantness that he spared us. I remember one of the latter who, one morning when I was expecting a parcel containing a new blouse from the Empress's dressmaker, absolutely refused to let it pass until I had unpicked the lining to prove to him that no letter or message had been concealed between it and the stuff itself. It was

the young Grand Duchesses who were most to be pitied among the prisoners of Czarskoi Selo. The girls were the sweetest things imaginable, and their beautiful characters came out in a splendid light during that trying time when, at an age where girls generally know only the sunny side of life, they had to become acquainted and to be actors in one of the greatest tragedies history has ever had to chronicle. And yet they realised perhaps even better than did their father and mother, the full extent of the drama which was being played around them. Olga, in particular, seemed to have a forewarning that it was only beginning and that it might end in blood just as it had begun in tears. She was a clever, thoughtful woman, with a considerable amount of common sense, and sometimes she used to confide to me her apprehensions in regard to the future. "If the Germans get near to Petrograd, or if a new revolution breaks out there," she often said, "we shall be its first victims, and either the mob or the Government will put us to death."

Tatiana was not so resigned as her sister. She revolted against the terrible injustice of which she was the victim, and she could not understand how

after all the care she had taken of wounded soldiers and miserable refugees whom her committee had helped, her good intentions had been misunderstood, and how she could have been put aside at a moment's notice and deprived of the possibility of going on further with the work to which she had given all her energy, and with which she had been so successful. She had an impetuous nature, more like her mother's than like the placid temperament of her father, and she would have liked to be able to express aloud the contempt which she felt for all those whose victim and prisoner she was. The two youngest daughters of the Czar and Czarina were still too much in the schoolroom to be able to do aught else but be astonished at the change which had taken place in their existence. They looked at all that was occurring with big, surprised eyes, and were more ready to weep than to attempt to fight against a fate which had proved too strong for them. They clung to their mother more than did Olga or Tatiana, and hardly left her protection. The Empress, who had never been a fond mother in the sense of caresses, had changed in that respect since the misfortunes that had fallen upon her, and she now hugged her girls and drew them

to her breast with a passionate earnestness which made the children exclaim that now they were happier than they had ever been before, because their mother embraced them just as much as if they had been poor little waifs, with a mamma ignorant of what etiquette meant. The remark had something touching about it, and I think that the Empress realised this as well as did others, because she showed herself more affectionate towards her daughters than she had been used to do, and was no longer absorbed by her exclusive tenderness for her son. She seemed indeed to have lost her interest in the latter since the day she had realised that he was no longer the heir to one of the greatest thrones in the world.

The child himself understood it, and he was perhaps the one who suffered most from the consequences of the change which had transformed him into an ordinary little boy, after he had been the most important personage in his family. He fretted over this change, and I fancy that at times he felt resentful against his father and mother for having so easily acquiesced in their own degradation. He would have liked to see his father make a stand against the Revolution, and at least refuse to sur-

render the rights of his son and heir. One day he betrayed something of his feelings when he told Count Benckendorff that if he had not been ill but with the Czar at Headquarters, as he generally was, he would never have allowed him to abdicate. The Count did not reply, but I imagine that he regretted such had not been the case. Indeed to this day it is incomprehensible to me how Nicholas II. could have been induced to sacrifice the rights of his son, and not to have insisted on the latter being proclaimed Emperor in his stead.

In the meantime the days dragged on, and we were all wondering whither all this was to lead. The feeling that a change of some kind was bound to take place floated in the air, but no one could guess of what nature this change was to be. At times the fear would seize us that the Government would remove the Czar and his Consort to the fortress, which would have meant that they would be tried, and perhaps condemned to terrible penalties for their imaginary crimes, but hard as we all tried to penetrate the secret of the future, we did not succeed in doing so, and when this future was revealed to us, it surpassed in horror all that we had ever imagined or dreaded.

CHAPTER XXI

EXILE—I AM DISMISSED

Towards the middle of the summer vague rumours reached us that in consequence of the agitation which was already shaking the country to a considerable degree, the Government had decided to remove Nicholas II. to another and safer residence than Czarskoi Selo. It was feared that if an insurrectionary movement took place at Petrograd, the mob might proceed to the Imperial Borough and murder the former Czar. At least this was the pretext put forward by the ministers, to explain the reasons which had induced them to put out of the way the unfortunate Emperor and his family. Of course no one believed them, because it would have been relatively easy to have controlled the populace in case it had tried to attack the Palace where the prisoners were confined. And if this had been thought impossible, surely there were other places than Siberia where they could have been sent.

I am not here, however, to blame or to excuse anybody. I wish merely to relate facts such as I have known them, and nothing else. So I shall proceed with my story, which is now drawing to an end.

It was in the course of a July afternoon that we were summoned before the military commander of Czarskoi Selo. By we I mean the household, or what was left of it, of the deposed sovereigns. We were informed that the latter were about to leave their present residence and that only a few persons would be allowed to accompany them. I was told that I would not be permitted to do so, as my presence was not considered necessary to the Empress, who, it was ironically remarked, would not require any longer two maids, especially one who like myself had purely academic functions. I pleaded hard to be exempted from this ordeal of being removed with others from the service of the gracious lady at whose side and in whose service I had remained twenty-five years, but my request and protestations were not taken into account. I was told to prepare myself to leave the Palace at a moment's notice and to have both my own things and those belonging to the Empress packed and ready to be taken away.

Count Benckendorff and Prince Dolgoroukoff, who declared that nothing but sheer force would part them from their former Sovereign, and two ladies in waiting on the Empress, the Princess Obolensky, and Mademoiselle von Butzov, who was specially attached to the service of the young Grand Duchesses, were allowed to travel with the prisoners, as well as some servants who had found favour in the eyes of the Government probably because they had consented to take upon themselves the duty of spying upon their master and mistress. But the suite was to be very limited, and to the last minute we were left in ignorance as to the real destination of Nicholas II. Count Benckendorff was the only exception to this measure and he was sworn to secrecy.

When I returned to the Palace, I could not help seeking the Empress and relating to her all that I had heard. She raised her hands to Heaven with the exclamation, "They will put us in the fortress, and then murder us like they did Louis XVI." But she showed no fear, and remained as calm and composed as ever, not caring to let her children be troubled sooner than was necessary with the news of what was awaiting them in the near future.

Three days later an officer sent by the government asked to see the young Grand Duchesses. He communicated to them the news that their parents were to be transported to Tobolsk in Siberia and that they were left entirely free to accompany them there or to remain at Czarskoi Selo, in which case they would be permitted to remain in the Palace and to occupy their present apartments. The girls did not hesitate one single moment and replied that they would not think of abandoning their father and mother, but would go with them wherever it pleased the government to send them. It is a curious thing that no one thought for one moment of suggesting that the little Alexis should be left in Europe, and the delicate child was not given a thought, but on the contrary despatched with alacrity to an exile which might easily kill him, as he was hardly strong enough to be able to withstand the rigour of the terrible climate to which he was being consigned. It was only after the Grand Duchesses had been called upon to make their decision that the Czar and his Consort were officially informed that they were about to be removed to Tobolsk. The place is about one of the worst in the whole of Siberia, both as regards temperature

and resources. Half village and half town, its population consists of political exiles and prisoners, and of Yakoutes, a savage, nomad folk, that spends its time in the unexplored forests which surround the town, whence they emerge from time to time to sell the furs which they have gathered together in the winter. The thermometer falls below freezing point for months at a stretch, and altogether it is one of the dreariest spots in the whole world. It is to this living death and to this awful solitude that were to be consigned the man and the woman whom the world had known as the Emperor and Empress of All the Russias, together with their innocent children. The Tour du Temple, where Louis XVI. was confined, was not half so awful as this.

And yet the Empress accepted the news if not with resignation at least with composure. To tell the truth she was weary of Czarskoi Selo, where everything reminded her of former and happier times, and perhaps she was not sorry to have at last a complete change of surroundings. She declared herself ready to start as soon as ordered to do so and busied herself with the preparations for her approaching departure just as if it had been a holi-

day excursion. The only thing which she asked for was to see her sister, the Grand Duchess Elizabeth, but though the latter was informed that she could if she wished proceed to Czarskoi Selo, she refused to do so, and contented herself with writing a very short and formal note to the Empress, who felt this want of heart far more than she admitted. These were indeed sad days that preceded the sad departure. None among us had the faintest hope of ever again seeing the kind masters we were parting from, and the prisoners themselves thought that they would never come back to this Russia that was behaving so harshly towards them. On the last evening the Emperor called us to his presence and thanked us for our faithful services. He was pale but otherwise unmoved. The whole thing seemed, to judge from his appearance, to constitute an episode that did not concern him. The Empress was agitated, but also resigned, and she tried to put on a gaiety which she did not feel. She had since the Revolution always worn black dresses, but on that evening she ordered me to prepare her for the morrow a dark blue costume. She did not wish strangers to think that she wore mourning for her misfortunes. No one slept that

night in the Palace, and when the hour for departure sounded there was not one dry eye amongst us. I obtained permission to accompany my mistress to the railway station and part of the way. My heart was bursting with despair.

They started—that unfortunate family—with an air of cheerful courage, on this momentous and awful journey. Without a sigh the Czarina bade good-bye to that Palace which had seen her greatness and her downfall. Probably she had, as Queen Elizabeth of Austria had once said, "died inwardly" long before that day, and nothing more could hurt her now. Without a tear she entered the train, such a shabby one when compared with the sumptuous cars in which she had been used to travel, and she did not even turn her head to look back on the theatre of her former splendour and misery. The whistle sounded, the engine began to move, and with it disappeared into space the haughty autocracy which had ruled over Russia—Holy Russia—since Peter the Great had organised it as an Empire, and which though no longer great, yet had remained an immense thing until the Revolution, with the mistakes and faults of its representatives, had finally destroyed it. . . .

I have nothing more to say. This is not a political work and I have purposely avoided any mention of my personal opinions in regard to the catastrophe which has sent my former masters into that Siberia which has witnessed already so many tragedies. Personally they have always been kind to me. I would be an ungrateful person if I did not acknowledge it, and if I forgot to shed tears over their fate.

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